STORIES SHORT AND STORIES TALL.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 374. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 29TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION. THE "SUPER-EMINENT" PIONEER REDUCTION SALE.

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, the well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds.

To the Influential Readers of "SHORT STORIES" and may not appear again.

Important announcement of Gigantic Reduction in the price of our Manufactures WILL TAKE EFFECT ON SIGHT of this advertisement, and is of great importance to parties furnishing.

REMARKS.—A lady customer writes complaining that we send out too large a carpet for the money. Be this so or not, we send out no Carpet measuring less than 6ft. by 9ft.—even for **2s. 11d.**

TEST THEM. THEY WILL SURPRISE YOU. EXTRAORDINARY REDUCTIONS.

100,000 "ALARM" CARPETS (Reg.)

Sale Price **2/11** Each.

GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS. This Gigantic Offer is a Special Contract made with Readers of *Short Stories* only. WE WILL FORWARD DIRECT FROM THE LOOMS TO ANY ADDRESS ON RECEIPT OF AMOUNT, **A GENUINE, WOVEN, SEAMLESS, REVERSIBLE CARPET,** THE LARGEST EVER SOLD AT THE PRICE.

Suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Bordered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as an advertisement for our Goods, thus saving any Middle Profits. Remember these are woven, not printed, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool. Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double the above prices. A Rug sent with Carpet, **10d.** extra.

SPECIAL OFFER—2 Carpets and 2 Rugs, 7s. 3d.

Value unequalled in the Annals of Advertising. As a favour, kindly examine and compare these Carpets.

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Rev. Canon Henderson
Rev. Canon Barrett
Dean Carrington
Ven. Archdeacon of Kilmore.
Ven. Archdeacon Wright
Archdeacon of Aghadoe
Archdeacon Long
Archdeacon of Dromore, D.D.
Archdeacon of Ossory
Archdeacon of Wolseley
Rev. Canon Tate
Rev. Canon Whitford
Rev. Canon Upperton
Rev. Canon W. W. Kirby
Rev. Canon Kinsman
Canon Prothero
Rev. Dr. Nelson
Rev. Dr. Banks
Lady Clayton

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE (CHANCERY DIVISION). HODGSON v. WEBB BROTHERS.—On the 18th day of July, 1890, his lordship, Mr. Justice Chitty, granted an interim injunction, restraining Messrs. Webb Brothers, of Hackney Wick, from infringing Mr. Fredk. Hodgson's Trade Mark "Eclipse," No. 93,774 (Leeds).

EXTRAORDINARY REDUCTIONS.

100,000 'ECLIPSE' CARPETS (Regd.)

GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.

Sale Price **3/6** Each.

This Gigantic Offer is a Special Contract, made with readers of *Short Stories* only. We will forward direct from the looms to any address on receipt of amount, A GENUINE WOVEN, SEAMLESS, REVERSIBLE CARPET, in our New (Reg.) Waterlily and Persian designs, suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Bordered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any Middle Profits. Remember these are Woven, not Printed, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool. Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double above prices. An "Eclipse" Rug sent with Carpet 1/- extra.

Sale Price **3/6** Each.

Kilkea Castle, Mageney, co. Kildare, 7th August.

LADY EVA FITZGERALD writes: "The 'Eclipse' Carpets supplied by Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son—her ladyship is much pleased with them."

SPECIAL OFFER.—Two Carpets and Two Rugs 8/-, or Four Carpets and Four Rugs 15/6.

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REDUCED SALE PRICE.

		Each.			Each.
6ft. by	9ft.	... 4/9	9ft. by	15ft.	... 12/6
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9ft. by	9ft.	... 7/6	12ft. by	13½ft.	... 14/6
9ft. by	10½ft.	... 8/6	12ft. by	15ft.	... 15/9
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When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

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Right Hon. Lady Martin-Keane
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Countess Cowley
Countess Lintzow
Countess of Westmeath
Countess of Mayo
Viscountess Torrington
Viscountess Molesworth
Viscountess of Hereford
Rev. Canon Hirst
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A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Regd.), to match above Carpets, sent for 1/6 extra, size 2yds. long and 1yd. wide. Special Offer, Three Hearthrugs for 4/3, or Six for 8s., or Twelve for 15/6.

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(Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

Cash returned in full if not satisfied.

F. HODGSON & SON, Manufacturers, Importers and Merchants, WOODSLEY RD., LEEDS.

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TWO GOLD MEDALS AWARDED.

These Costumes have received the highest praise from the leading journals of the day, and are justly regarded by all purchasers as **Even Better than Advertised.**

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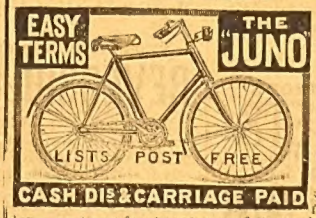

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PEARSON'S

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COUPON.

No. 9

Feb. 29, 1896.

S.S. S.S.

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A doctor's widow knows of a simple, inexpensive remedy that permanently destroys the roots, and will forward particulars free to all those afflicted sending stamped envelope. Address Mrs. B. D. WOOD, 4, DUKE STREET, VILLIERS STREET, LONDON, W.

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See Illus. Guide and Catalogue (239 pages), 3d. "How to Open a Clear Stores, from £20 to £2,000." TOBACCONISTS' OUTFITTING CO., 186, Euston Road, London. (Over 50 years' reputation.) Manager, H. MYERS.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON

No. 374.] For the Week ending February 29th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

THE CHARM IN ESTHER'S EYES.

SIX men were seated round a table at dinner. They had been discussing the Jews in London.

Stanwood was a specialist on the subject. "I know what I am talking about," he remarked somewhat irritably, for the men had been laughing at his theories. "There's not a man in this room who will go into six old-clothes' shops in the East-end that I can show him, price an overcoat, and come away without buying one. As I said before, I will wager a dinner on it."

"I don't see where the difficulty comes in," said Rochester. "I'll take the bet."

The following morning the six men were driving from Piccadilly to the East-end. Stanwood was directing the route. Presently, when they came to the Jewish quarter, they left the carriage, and walked down a bye-street. Mr. Rochester, as the morning was cold, was dressed in a rough travelling suit. He hailed from the country.

"Here we are," said Stanwood, and five men crossed the street, where they could watch Rochester unobserved.

* * * * *

Rochester has just passed under the arcade of trousers and vests in front of Funkenstein's when a little old man with a grey beard and sharp eyes seized his arm.

"I know vot you vand. You vand a shpring ofercoad, ain't id?"

"Have you got any spring overcoats?" asked Mr. Rochester.

"Haf I? Der finest in der vorld. Gome insite." And they went inside.

"Vot price?" asked Mr. Funkenstein.

"I'm not particular. I want something that will not show the dust."

"Rebecca, get down dem goods and don't be loafin' dere," said the vendor sharply. "I vouldn't show 'em to eferybody, my frient. (In a theatrical whisper.) Dese vas send to a frient py der Brince of Vales. Dey vas too schmall for him, und he gafe 'em to his man vat sold 'em. You don't gif it avay!" said Mr. Funkenstein, suddenly checking himself and staring suspiciously at Rochester, fearing that he had told too much.

"I will not," said Rochester.

"Dere now. Chust see dot," said the vendor admiringly, as he exhibited an overcoat which, in the dim light, looked perfectly new. It was faced with ostensible silk, and was of the latest cut.

"How much is it?" asked Rochester.

"£2 10s., vort £5 if it's vort anything."

Had it not been for the bet the bargain really would have been tempting. Mindful of his mission, however, Rochester shook his head and edged away.

"Holt on; vait a minid. I got all kinds of shpring ofercoads. Tventy dozen here and tventy cases upstairs. Maybe you don't like der colour? Vat colour you like? Prown? Veepin' Rachel, you ought to see der prown vons." And in a second he had conjured three from somewhere in different shades, and had one over Rochester's right arm and two in his hands.

"Take der middle vun. Fits your comblexion vonderful. Nefer seen vun fit a man's comblexion like dot. Chust your size."

Rochester found himself encircled with a tape round his chest.

"Vell! vell! vell!" cried Funkenstein, astonished.

"Vat ees it, Isaac?" screamed Rebecca, startled.

"Oh! vot a shplendid chest! Oh, coot cracious! You was a brize fighder, my frient. I tink so when you come in. Rebecca, is dot a brize fighder's ofercoad you got dere? Dry it on, my frient, dry it on."

Before Rochester could protest his arms were half way in the sleeves, and Rebecca and Isaac skilfully slipped it over his shoulders.

Rochester looked sheepish. He wished he was out of it. He seemed to be under some kind of an obligation to purchase an overcoat that he had not foreseen. He felt fatally sure that if he didn't get that overcoat off his back he would buy it. All this ran through his mind in the dark little shop while Isaac was bunching it up in the back and saying critically:

"Nefer seen anyding like id. Fits like it vos mate to orter."

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"Like der shkin on a sossitch," echoed Rebecca.

Rochester acted with decision. He took half-a-crown from his pocket, and said:

"Here, I—I have an appointment. This will pay you for your trouble."

He stripped off the coat, and fled in the temporary astonishment he had caused.

"Vy didn't he take der coat vit him?" said Rebecca, grinning at Isaac as she looked at the coin.

But Isaac was already outside, and had hooked another fish.

* * * * * *

Rochester felt that he needed time for reflection. He did not dare look in the direction of the five broad grins, which he felt sure were a short distance away. He lit a cigar and ruminated. He must keep the overcoat away from him; that was evident. This was the only conclusion reached when a voice said:

"I got id—£2."

It was Motzenhauser. Motzenhauser was pointing to an overcoat on a dummy. Motzenhauser had watched all the Funkenstein proceedings except the finale. He had agreed with Mrs. Motzenhauser that Rochester was from the country, and planned accordingly.

"Gome insite," said Motzenhauser.

Rochester hesitated. He wished to refuse, but it was part of the bet to enter.

"I had a son go oud to trade," said Mrs. Motzenhauser.

Rochester is polite to all women.

"Indeed," said he.

"Chacob Motzenhauser vos his name. He sold cowlar puttons und stud links; put now he has a pig shop. You know Chacob?"

Rochester thought he had met several Chacobs in his travels. But still denied it. He did not know what subtle logical sequence might lie between acquaintanceship with Chacob and buying a coat.

"Try dis on," said Motzenhauser, himself and wife grabbing the customer's hands.

He knew the dodge, and stepped backwards just in time.

"Thank you. I won't try it on," he said. "It's too—too light," he added, at a venture.

The mates to it in six darker shades were instantly forthcoming. Rochester felt that he had put his foot in it. He didn't know what to say.

"I mean it's too thin for the weather."

They held up their hands in astonishment, and waved them horizontally from the wrist-joint above their shoulders.

"Sufferin' Lazarus. Too thin?. Vy, you vear sometings heffier as dot and purn to a grisp."

"I'm not going to be in London," said Rochester.

"Vere you goin'?"

"To—to Greenland!"

He rushed out without more words.

* * * * * *

Motzenhauser and his wife stared at Rochester from the doorway, and made some kind of a sign to the street, for the street was watching intently wherever it was not occupied "inside." The sign meant that he was a crank. The street nodded, but still watched. The crank was going into Katzenyammer's. What would Katzenyammer do with him? That was the question.

Katzenyammer was the acknowledged king of the street. He would sell a suit of clothes to a wooden figure. He would sell a man a tin watch at the top price, and make him think he had got the Strasburg clock with the cathedral thrown in. What would Katzenyammer do with him? That was the question in which the street and five club-men were deeply interested.

But Katzenyammer's place showed no signs of life. It was either unheard of carelessness or a bold stroke of genius. The historian is able to state that it was the latter. Katzenyammer had not missed a point of the preceding encounter, and had his own theory. Rochester saw the neglected doorway, and argued favourably. He would not be very much bothered in that place, and he entered with a sigh of relief. It was half lighted like all of them. Katzenyammer was seated quietly smoking a long pipe. Two young men and a women were seated about, to bolster him up.

"I want to price an overcoat," said Rochester, thereby fatally committing himself.

"A spring ofercoad?" asked Katzenyammer indifferently.

"Yes."

Katzenyammer did not move.

"Vot brice?" asked he.

"Anything under £3."

Katzenyammer smoked.

"Vat colour?"

Rochester was a little nettled. "Any neutral colour," said he. "Something that is light and will not show the dust."

Katzenyammer considered. "I don't tink," he began doubtfully, "you vouldn't come in here foolin' vit a man and takin' up his dime ven you didn't vand to puy no ofercoad, vould you?"

"Of course not," said Rochester angrily.

"Sow der chentlemen a coad, Simon," said Katzenyammer.

There were twenty-seven coats all answering the description Rochester had given, and all his size. He examined one and refused it. With another he did the same. Another would not do. Each time he had to find the faults. Each time he was looked at with suspicion. His ingenuity was taxed beyond its limits. He was at his wits' end. There were twenty-four overcoats still to battle with and pretend to find fault with. Rochester is conscientious. That is his weakness. He turned to silent Katzenyammer.

"I have changed my mind, and will not buy an overcoat to-day. I will, however, pay you for your trouble and time. How much is it?"

Katzenyammer knew it all the time. He smoked indifferently. His feelings were hurt.

"Vat's der brice of der coad, Simon?"

"£1."

Katzenyammer nodded at Rochester. Some people would not have done it, but Katzenyammer would have found a weak spot in them, as he did in Rochester. The latter handed him a sovereign, and then went meanly out.

* * * * * *

The street was amazed. Katzenyammer had missed him—wonder of wonders! The quintet was uneasy. Rochester's staying powers were a marvel entirely unexpected. Next door, however, all was excitement.

It was the chance of a lifetime, and Hammerschmidt rose to it. The sale was nothing. The prestige was all.

"K-vick! K-vick!" the old man cried in his excitement, as he drove the representatives of four generations into the back room. All depended on Esther. She alone could take the trick that Katzenyammer even had failed in.

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This door, too, was unattended. Rochester, with many misgivings, passed in.

As he stared about the half-lighted place his eyes fell on those of a girl of seventeen, who sat under a row of bell-bottom trousers hanging on the wall. They were beautiful eyes that met his view—large, lustrous, loving, and sad—the historic eyes of the Jewess of romance.

"I wish to price an overcoat," said Rochester gently.

"My father is not here, and I don't know the goods," said Esther with a troubled look.

"Oh, I expect you can find me something," said he relieved. "I'm not particular."

"Is it for winter?" she asked.

"Yes; such as they wear at the play. Do you ever go to the play in the winter time?" asked Rochester.

"I never have been, but I should like to go," said Esther.

She smiled. Her teeth were even and white. She was undeniably pretty. She walked well. Heredity had been kind to her. Twenty generations of pedlar's packs had curved her back not in the least. He watched her, for Rochester is artistic, as she fumbled among some overcoats. That red shawl and that head certainly formed a picture.

"Will you try this on?" she asked gently, holding it out to him.

It was the critical moment. Hammerschmidt was peeping through a crack in the door, and giving momentary bulletins to his wife. Every knot-hole in the ceiling had an eye to it, and there were several knot-holes. Funkenstein, Motzenhauser, and Katzenyammer, were all ill at ease, notwithstanding they had not all done badly. The street was in a painful state of suspense, and the quintet were betting wine in a trying state of doubt.

"If you will put it on for me," said Rochester tenderly.

Hammerschmidt's long breath of relief was audible in the shop, though foolish Rochester heeded it not. The agony was over. Esther would never let him get that coat off again. If she did he would disinherit her.

Dimpled hands raised the overcoat to his shoulders; warm fingers pressed it forward about his neck, and as they did so touched his cheek. Esther's purchases in the perfumery line were not imported, but as she buttoned the top button it seemed as if it was "Brisas de las Pampas" in the dark, heavy folds of her hair.

"Will it do?" she asked timidly. "I never tried before."

"Of course," said Rochester gallantly. Then he stopped. A look of consternation crept over his face, and he ground his teeth.

"Of course," he repeated, smothering the thought and smiling on the beautiful girl. "How much is it?"

Esther, with some difficulty, found the card on the starboard coat-tail, and said: "£3." Esther was not slow herself. He gave her the money and she thanked him gracefully.

"You say you'd like to go to the play this——"

"Esther-go-und-see-vat-time-der-teakettle-will-be-done-alreaty-don't-be-vaitin'-round-here-ven-dere's-no-tea-Esther-be-kvick-aboud-it!" yelled Hammerschmidt all in a breath, as he burst into the front shop.

She went like the startled fawn. Hammerschmidt did not look like an invitation to dinner, but had the inhospitable and biassed expression of a meat-axe. He looked as if he might have a great deal to say, but Rochester did not care for conversation. He bowed and went hurriedly out.

* * * * * *

As he came into the broad daylight with the overcoat on a yell sounded down the street. Five men roared, and slapped their thighs, and laughed like lunatics. The street looked at them in amazement. As Rochester went towards them they laughed harder and harder.

He had on an old melton overcoat, pale-green under the collar, faded grey in various shades in the skirt. It was frayed at the cuffs, worn out and sewed up at the buttonholes, and had a small patch on one of the sleeves.

"You needn't laugh," he said, with suppressed anger. "In fact, I won't have it," he added hotly. "I've lost the bet, and that's enough said."

They stopped laughing, but looked very queer. Now and then they inspected him furtively out of the corners of their eyes, as he took the lead, scowling. But there was imminent danger of explosion all the way back to the club.

H. J. W. D.

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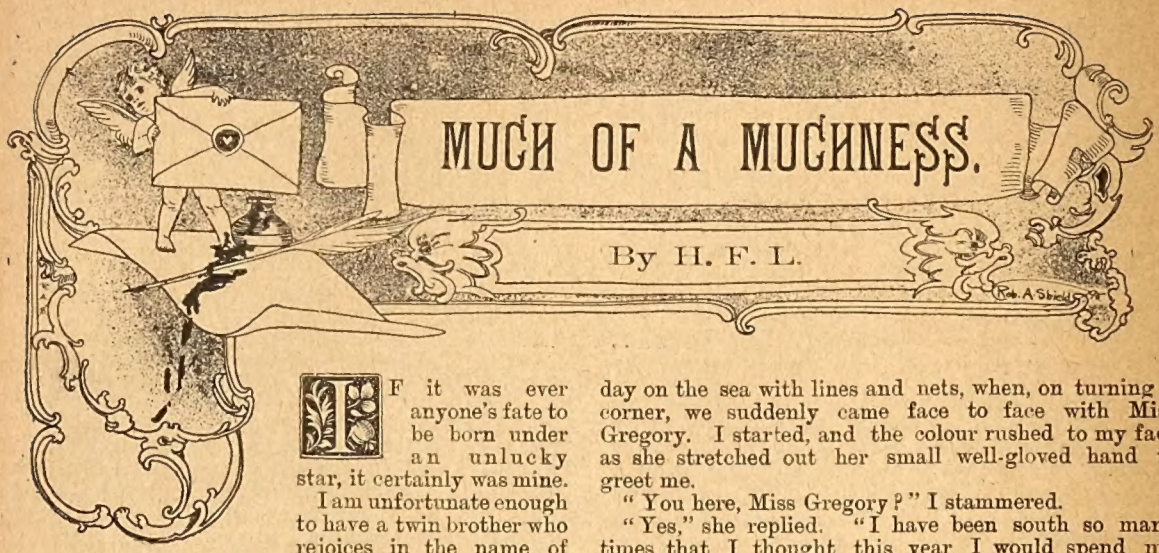

MUCH OF A MUCHNESS.

By H. F. L.

IF it was ever anyone's fate to be born under an unlucky star, it certainly was mine.

I am unfortunate enough to have a twin brother who rejoices in the name of William. We are alike as two pins—at least, so everybody tells us. I don't think so, however, for William is a happy-go-lucky sort of fellow, no good at anything, and always getting into scrapes for which I invariably get the blame; you can therefore naturally understand that I do not look upon it as an honour to be taken for my brother, although he has not the slighest objection to being mistaken for me.

As a matter of fact, I am slightly the taller, but the colour of our eyes and hair are the same, our faces have the same expression, and the tone of our voices is barely distinguishable.

In spite of the difficulties I used to get into through William's idle freaks and gossip, a strong feeling of brotherly love existed between us, and I am proud to say that feeling still exists to this day, in spite of the severe tests to which it has been put.

After leaving college we separated. My brother was articled to a firm of solicitors, and I started a weekly periodical in the south of Wales, which I am proud to say obtained a very fair circulation, and brought me in a very comfortable little income.

The ridiculous likeness between us seemed to increase year by year as time went on, instead of decreasing, and in self-defence I at last determined to cultivate a beard and moustache, and thus save myself from having the sins of my brother visited upon my own head.

We both welcomed the month of September, for it was then we took our holidays. We always spent them together, and enjoyed talking over the many jokes of the past which we had been able to play both at school and college, on account of our remarkable likeness to each other. William was therefore not at all surprised to receive from me one morning a letter, arranging for a trip to Scotland as soon as he could get away from his duties.

Three weeks later we might have been seen standing on one of the platforms in Edinburgh railway station, waiting for a train which was to convey us and our baggage to a small town on the east coast of Scotland, between Aberdeen and Montrose.

Late one evening, about a week after we had arrived, we were wending our way back to our hotel, carrying between us a large basket of fish, the result of a long day on the sea with lines and nets, when, on turning a corner, we suddenly came face to face with Miss Gregory. I started, and the colour rushed to my face as she stretched out her small well-gloved hand to greet me.

"You here, Miss Gregory?" I stammered.

"Yes," she replied. "I have been south so many times that I thought this year I would spend my holidays in Scotland; but I certainly never expected to meet you here. You never told me you were going north."

Miss Gregory and I had for some time past been very good friends, and it was only for my brother's sake that I was sorry I had come across her.

That evening after dinner I told my brother as nicely as I could that he was not to mind if I did not give up all my time to him, and the various excursions we had planned, as I had not calculated on coming across Clara. He grumbled a good deal at first, and made a few unkind remarks, which I do not for the moment believe he meant—something about his company not being good enough, and also about Clara, adding how thankful he was that I had not introduced him—for he had left us talking at the corner of the street, and had walked on to the hotel alone, taking the fish with him.

The following day was Thursday, that particular Thursday in September when the inhabitants of the small town repaired *en masse* to the large flat field north of the town to witness the Highland games and sports.

Of course, I took Clara, leaving William to look after himself, and succeeded in obtaining very good places inside the ring.

It was a glorious day; the sun shone brilliantly, and the strapping pipers in their many coloured plaids, drew forth stirring music from their bagpipes, and as each champion achieved some victory, or performed some great feat of strength, the applause was deafening, which proved the onlookers to be in high spirits.

I was thoroughly contented, basking in the sun by the side of Clara who was chattering away as only women can. Suddenly my eyes fell on a familiar figure, it was that of my brother Will, yes, there was no doubt about it, it was Will strolling about with a young girl who had lovely golden hair, which the sun seemed to turn into threads of that precious metal.

Had it not been that his face was turned towards me, and I saw it was clean shaven, I might have thought it was my ghost, for we each had on our College blazers, with ribbons on our white straw hats to match, and white flannel trousers, which had only that morning come back from the wash.

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I was about to point him out to Clara when I found he had disappeared in the crowd.

It seemed to get hotter and hotter, and I was glad to get what shade I could from the parasol of an old lady who was sitting behind me. The men selling iced drinks were doing a roaring trade, and I determined at the risk of losing my place to get some for my charge. so making some excuse about being cramped and rather stiff, I left her, thinking that refreshment would be all the more acceptable if it came as a surprise.

The crowd round the ice vendors was tremendous, and it was some time before I succeeded in obtaining what I required. I was successful at last, however, and then proceeded to make my way back, with an ice in one hand and some delicious looking fruit in the other, but it was not such an easy task as I anticipated.

The sports were still in full swing, and the throng round the inclosure seemed thicker than ever.

I well remember how fearfully pushed about and elbowed I got: everyone seemed to put themselves in my way. They would not give me a chance; in fact, they seemed to think that I was trying to push myself in front of them on purpose to obscure their view.

The ice soon melted, and to make matters worse some clumsy idiot pushed my arm and spilt the pink liquid—for it was originally a strawberry ice—all over my hitherto spotless white trousers, this annoyed me exceedingly, especially when I was informed on remonstrating that it was all through my own carelessness.

When at last I did get to my seat, I had only, besides the empty ice-glass, a squashed peach left, this I was with many apologies about to offer Clara when to my dismay, I observed her seat was empty, and that she was nowhere to be seen.

I searched up and down, and made inquiries, but no one could tell me what had become of her, and at last, the sports having come to an end I was, with the crowd, swept out of the field.

It was not long before I was at No. 19 T—— Street, where I knew my little woman was staying, I rang at the bell, and sent up my card. Imagine therefore my surprise when the servant returned with a message to say that Miss Gregory would not see me, and that she would be glad if I would not trouble to call again.

I met my brother in the hall of the hotel as I entered, he was in high spirits, and began discussing the events of the afternoon, but I pretended not to hear, and pushing past him, went up to my room.

It was at dinner that evening the truth suddenly dawned upon me. Clara must have become impatient while I was away getting the refreshments and have left her seat to look for me. She then in all probability caught sight of my brother walking about with Miss Wilson, to whom he had been introduced by a friend, and had mistaken him for me, though had she seen his face she would have perceived her error, for he boasted of no beard or moustache.

I endeavoured to console myself by explaining to my brother how matters stood, but he only laughed, and looked upon the whole affair as a first-rate joke. Seeing, however, that I was annoyed, he good-naturedly undertook to do anything in his power to help me, and I promised that should an opportunity occur, I should not fail to avail myself of his offer.

How many cigarettes we smoked that evening, trying to find a way out of my difficulty, I should not like to say, but Will finally decided that, as it was indirectly through him that I had lost my lady love, it should be through him that I would get her back again. I did not see how the affair was going to be managed, but being assured by him that it would turn out all right, I left the matter in his hands.

Next morning, by Will's orders, I packed up my goods and set out by the 10.30 train on my return journey to Wales, vowing never again to set foot in Scotland.

It was about a year after the event recorded above that, on looking through my paper one morning, my eye was caught by the announcement of an engagement between Miss Gregory and my brother Will. I could scarcely believe my eyes, and in my rage took the next train to London, and hunted up my brother.

I found him in his rooms, he having just got back from his office, and at once demanded an explantion from him. I was in a towering rage.

"Calm yourself, my dear fellow," he began; "I am simply working to fulfil my promise that as it was through me you lost Clara, it should be through me you regained her."

"I do not understand you," I stammered; "your marrying her will make it practically impossible. How am I to ever hope of winning her when she is your wife?"

"My what?"

"Your wife."

"My dear fellow, I am not going to marry her. I never had the least intention of doing so."

"I don't understand you," I gasped. "What does this mean?" and I handed him the paper which contained a notice of the engagement.

"That? Why that's the announcement of *your* engagement—not mine."

And then he explained how he had won her for my sake, and that all I had to do, if I wished to marry her, and free him, was to shave off my beard, and change my name from Henry to William.

* * * * * *

A month later I was married to Clara. To this day she believes I am William, and I am not going to shake her belief.

My brother is proud of having kept his word, and also of the beard and moustache which he has lately cultivated, and he tells me—I believe to console himself—that he would not change places with me for all the Claras in the world.

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WHEN THE BIRDS BEGIN TO SING

By WINIFRED GRAHAM. *Author of "Through the Valley," "Six First-Class Passengers," etc.*

SUMMARY.

Philip Roche marries Eleanor Grebby, daughter of a farmer, and they spend their honeymoon on the Continent. On their return to Richmond, Eleanor becomes friendly with a frivolous widow, Mrs. Mounteagle, against her husband's wishes. She is introduced to Carol Quinton, who fascinates her. Her husband is heart-broken, and consults his cousin, Erminie Henderson, who comes to stay with them. Eleanor's parents come to spend a day or two with her, and disgust Mrs. Mounteagle with their homeliness.

CHAPTER IX.

HEART SICK AND WEARY WITH THE JOURNEY'S FRET.

"You must *not* go to-day," declares Eleanor emphatically, addressing her parents. "I want to take you to Mrs. Mounteagle's party this afternoon. I am sure she won't mind, we are such *great* friends, and two more will make no difference in a tea and coffee, four-to-seven squash."

"Is it a real grand party?" asks Mrs. Grebby.

"Oh, yes; no end of people have been invited, and Giddy's affairs are always so *chic*—that meaning stylish, smart—all sorts of grand dresses and bonnets. The good, innocent-minded girls wear big hats, with huge brims and fluffy feathers, and the wicked married women have the tiniest bonnets, sparkling with jet or passementerie, and their veils fastened by diamond stars."

Mrs. Grebby gasps in wonderment. "I will lend you two jewelled pins for your head gear, Ma—one of turquoise and another in the shape of an olive—that Philip bought abroad, and declares is only paste."

"Well, we *shall* be swells," says Mr. Grebby, grinning, "and my word, what a lot we'll have to talk about when we gets 'ome."

"Yes, and you will sit with Farmer Briggs till goodness knows how late," replies Eleanor, "smoking and drinking, and chatting, till he is blue in the face with astonishment, and his eyes nearly dropping out of his head."

"Telling of Ma going into Society," he continues, "and me dressed up as a toff, conversationalling with Lady MacDonald."

"What a lovely idea!" cries Eleanor. "I will write at once to Giddy, and tell her to expect you."

The intense happiness these old people have brought into Eleanor's life is quite pitiful to see. Old memories re-awaken, the gaiety of childhood is hers again as she plays with Rover and talks with "Dad."

Oh, the wild excitement of showing them her treasures, rummaging in the plate-box, and spreading every ornament from her jewel-case on her blue silk quilt, and trotting Mrs. Grebby panting from the cellars to the attic.

It is exhilarating, delightful! Philip, too, is kind and hospitable, never smiling at the odd mistakes the good-natured Grebbys are apt to make.

"There," says Eleanor, shutting down an envelope and ringing for Sarah, "I have written the note to Giddy."

She whistles Rover through the window, who is scratching up the lawn, with splendid energy.

He bounds in and leaps on the sofa. Eleanor proceeds to scratch his back comfortingly with a little ivory hand on the end of a long horn stick. Then she calls for a comb, which Sarah produces, and fluffs at his coarse hair, which is stiff, wiry, and grey.

"Mrs. Mounteagle has called to see you," says a voice in the doorway, when Rover's toilette (which has occupied a full half-hour) is eventually completed.

"Oh! show her in."

"But," with a glance at Mr. and Mrs. Grebby, "if you please, ma'am, she asked to speak to you alone."

"I hope Herr Wieder, the violinist, has not failed. He had an affection of the bronchial tubes last week, but that does not sound on the violin."

Eleanor closes the folding doors between her boudoir and the library.

"You stay here, darlings," she says in a soft, cooing voice, "and I

Flaunts it to Giddy's presence.

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will see Giddy in the next room. Come on, Rover—down, old boy—your wet paws have done damage enough to my gown for one morning."

Still whistling, Eleanor saunters into Giddy's presence, her eyes as radiant as stars, her lips parted in joyous greeting.

"You dear thing," she cries, "to come and see me, when you must be so busy, pinning bits of drapery over your doors, and heaping flowers into enormous vases. Can I come in and help? I am splendid at decorations, you know," remembering Giddy's cynical remarks on her artistic efforts, and laughing merrily.

"No, dear, all is prepared," speaking in funereal tones. "*But*——"

"Well?"

Giddy's eyes shift uneasily. Then she speaks straight out: "I *can't* have your people! My dear child, it would be madness—positive madness, both to yourself and to me. There, there, don't look so blank; one would think I had suggested murdering good Mrs. Grebby and her dear fat husband. Can't you see it, Eleanor? You have a good position in Richmond, and you want to take it and fling it into the river, as it were. You want to flaunt your parentage at my party before everyone."

"Yes," says Eleanor firmly; "I am not ashamed of them, it is not in me to be ashamed. What is wrong with them?"

Giddy's mouth curves, her little foot taps impatiently on the floor at Eleanor's defiant attitude.

"You *must* see, or are you utterly blind—utterly imbecile? Now, child, take my warning—shunt the old people at once—trundle them off the London junction—send them puffing back in a slow train to the country—tell them never to enter Lyndhurst again—keep them out of Richmond. It was terrible yesterday—a scene I shall never forget. Lady MacDonald was so sweet over it, though I could see she was petrified."

"I don't understand you," mutters Eleanor, pale and trembling. "If you have come here to insult me——"

"Tut, tut! Don't be silly. But I am bitterly disappointed in you. I have taken so much pains over your social education. But you are like a girl in iron stays, the moment you remove the support (which is my guiding hand) you go flop! Now don't turn rusty, or cry," as tears of passion well into Eleanor's eyes. "I want you at my party—I want youth and beauty, for I have a reputation for producing lovely women, good-looking men, and distractingly sweet girls. Carol has promised to come early, now, for one, you would not like him to see your relations."

"Yes, I should," she replies. "He would not mind, *he* is a gentleman!"

"I cannot have them, anyhow," declares Giddy firmly. "You may be offended, for I have spoken plainly——"

"A great deal too plainly," retorts Eleanor fiercely. "You have not spared my feelings. You think yourself very grand, but my parents would not have hurt anyone as you have hurt me to-day! You sneer at them—hold them up to ridicule—while they are worth all the dressed-up Lady MacDonalds you toady to!"

Her voice has risen shrilly; she forgets the folding doors.

"Enough!" says Giddy, tossing her head. "I suffered at your hands yesterday. Pray spare me the effort of argument. Remember I have to entertain, and must reserve my strength. Besides, it is so vulgar to quarrel."

Eleanor walks haughtily to the door and flings it open.

"If I talk any more I shall stifle," she says.

Giddy gives a low laugh.

"You will agree with me when you get over your temper," she declares, passing out.

Eleanor sinks on her knees, and buries her head on Rover's shaggy coat. She is alone, and the faint sound of buried sobs throbs upon the silence of the room.

The dog licks her hands and whines. Slowly the folding doors push open, and the old couple stand upon the threshold.

Mr. Grebby's round face is pale, Mrs. Grebby's cheeks wet with fast falling tears.

"Oh! dearie, dearie," she cries, folding Eleanor in her arms. "We ought not to 'ave come, we didn't know. But she was right, dearie, and we will go away, and you shall have your party, and your friends. Oh! we was wrong, all wrong."

"Oh, dearie, dearie!"

"Don't talk like that," moans Eleanor, realising they have overheard. "She is a wicked snob—a—a—"

"There, dearie, be calm, don't fret."

"I will never forgive her," Eleanor stammers. "I love you and I hate Giddy."

She kisses Mrs. Grebby's damp cheeks, talking between her sobs. "It was not true, not one word of it, she just said it all to be disagreeable. She likes me to be miserable. I don't believe she ever had any parents of her own—I mean, not what you call parents. Some say she was born in a workhouse, a caravan, or an east-end doss. Though how she managed to be what she is they can't explain. I thought she was nice, mammy. I called her my friend. I tried to be like her," shuddering at the recollection. "Oh! don't go away," taking them each by the hand.

"Thank you, my girl, thank you," murmurs Mr. Grebby, "but Ma and I are better at Copthorne. We are not fit for Society; some day you will come back to the old 'ome and see us, won't you? and we'll all be happy again together."

Eleanor and Mrs. Grebby dry their tears, while Mr. Grebby pats them both on the back cheerily. Rover fawns round, barking and wagging his tail.

Philip, who is staying late from town this morning in

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honour of his guests, enters the room. "What is the matter?" he asks, looking at Eleanor's wistful face.

"I am not going to Mrs. Mounteagle's party," she says.

"Well, never mind. You can send your frock round," he cries jokingly, "and ask her to put it on a chair with a label: 'This is what Mrs. Roche would have worn had she been here.'"

But his chaff is received in silence. Then he notices for the first time the red rims round her eyes.

"Why, little woman, you have been crying!"

"Yes," murmurs Eleanor, "I have quarrelled with Giddy."

Then between them the three explain as best they can what has happened.

Philip is deeply interested.

"It was all our mistake," whimpers Mrs. Grebby. "We are that sorry; we wouldn't 'ave come. We really didn't guess what an upset it would make—parting friends, and bringin' trouble on our darling."

"Do not regret it," says Mr. Roche, taking her hand. "Such friends are not worth having, and Eleanor is well rid of them."

Secretly he blesses the Grebbys for their timely appearance, and resolves to write to Erminie and inform her of the fact.

"We are goin' back this morning," continues Mrs. Grebby. "Harriet expects us, and is reserving a front room in her lodging house. There, dearie," as Eleanor protests, "don't take on; we'd best go."

"Yes, Ma's right, my girl; Ma's always right," adds Mr. Grebby, with an admiring glance at his wife.

There are more tears before the final parting, when Eleanor watches them drive away with her husband, who has promised to escort them to town, and put them safely in a cab.

"Mind you see they go comfortably to Cousin Harriet's," she says before he leaves. "No wandering about seeking omnibuses, carrying bags, and leading Rover."

They wave farewell. Giddy sees them from her window driving down the terrace.

"My words have carried good weight," she thinks. "Eleanor has shunted those objectionable bumpkins after all."

When they were gone Eleanor puts on her hat and cloak, and sallies forth in the chill wintry air.

She enters the telegraph office, and addresses a form to Carol Quinton.

"Don't go to G's party this afternoon. Come to Lyndhurst instead.—E."

Then she walks back up the hill, a strange thrill of exhilaration rushing over her.

"Good looking men at her parties," she says to herself. "Carol has promised to come early, has he? We shall see.'

A little bundle of sad silk drapery.

The house seems dull and depressing without the old people or Rover. Philip is sure to stay late in the City, having spent most of the morning at home, and since she has no engagement. Thus Eleanor eases her conscience and waits expectantly for Carol.

Her drawing-room with its bright log fire looks cosy in the extreme as Mr. Quinton enters it that afternoon.

Eleanor is curled up on the sofa, a little bundle of sad silk drapery. Her eyes are wistful, her tea-gown is black.

The dim light reveals not the slight *soupçon* of powder paling her features. She barely rises to greet him, only moving to a sitting posture, her feet still tucked under her, holding out a trembling hand. As the door closes, he grasps the pink fingers and presses them to his lips.

"Don't," with a reproachful glance from under her long fringed lashes, "that is not kind."

"But they are such tempting fingers," he whispers apologetically.

"Come, draw up that chair and sit beside me like a doctor, only I want you to heal my sorrows. I have got such a horrid wound *here*," pressing her heart. "But first of all, was I wrong to telegraph? Are you angry, Mr. Quinton?"

"It was delightful of you," he murmurs, looking down on her with all his eyes. "Dear Mrs. Roche, I thank you from my soul. Only let me be your confidant—your friend!"

"Have you been to Giddy's?" she asks eagerly.

"No, what do you take me for? Was I not commanded to come here instead?"

"Giddy is no longer my friend; she has treated me abominably—snubbed and insulted me in my own house, simply because I wanted to bring my parents to her stupid party. They are the dearest old people from the country, not gifted with her false Society airs. I was only a farmer's daughter, you know. She taunted me with meeting you at her house and being ashamed of my parents. Bah! it sickens me."

She flung her head back with an air of offended dignity, her eyes flashing at the remembrance of Giddy's stinging phrases.

"The impudent little fiend!" mutters Quinton through his teeth. "How dare she?"

"Oh, she dares very well. I am in mortal terror of her tongue. We are utterly at the mercy of our friends; these people call themselves friends, though they deal us the bitterest cuts, the cruellest contumely."

"How *dare* she?" he repeats again, a fierce expression clouding his brow. "To attack a poor little thing like you, and for such a reason——"

"It was very hard—it made me cry," nodding her head and gazing earnestly upon him.

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"How bewitching she looks in the slim black robe," he thinks. It clings round her elegant figure, and contrasts with her fair hair and delicate colouring.

"What can I do to comfort you?" he says, drawing nearer.

"Stay away from Giddy—take my part. Stand up for me when you hear her or Lady MacDonald laughing over Mrs. Roche's relatives."

"They would never dream of taking your name in vain while I was there to defend it!" he cries. "Don't you know I would do anything in the world for you? Can't you see how I would willingly be your slave? Will you accept me as such? Use me as you will! When in trouble, call me; I shall be always ready. No woman has ever exercised the influence over me that you have done. I would give my whole life to serve you for a moment—to tie the lace of your shoe—to sit at your feet—and adore——"

His lavish devotion pleases Eleanor. A flush of pleasure peeps through the white skin, her eyes droop, her breathing quickens.

"I think my life will be better, brighter, nobler, for the knowledge of such unselfish friendship: I can be but a poor friend to you, I am neither influential nor particularly attractive. Only a very simple little woman living very much in herself."

"Mr. Roche is a good deal away, isn't he?"

"Yes, especially in the day time. I am very lonely sometimes. But how dark it is growing. Shall I ring for a light?"

"No," with an imploring gesture, "this is the hour to dream, and to see more clearly into other natures, to reveal secrets that cannot be left unknown for ever."

He grasps her hands, and kneeling beside her buries his head in the folds of her long black sleeves.

"Oh! love—my love!" he gasps.

CHAPTER X.

Falser than all Fancy Fathoms.

"What are you going to do to-day?" asks Philip, kissing Eleanor before he leaves.

"I must run up to town to have my dress fitted," she replies.

"What, more new frocks?"

"Only a very simple evening rag, dear," speaking nervously. "I am rather anxious about it, because it is the first I have had since my trousseau without Giddy's supervision. She always designs them, and does the talking."

"And pockets the commission," says Philip drily. "Do not regret that lost acquaintance, little one. If Mrs. Mounteagle opened your eyes, don't you allow her to shut them again."

"You will lose your train if you stand talking."

Philip drives away down the hill, and Eleanor thinks regretfully of the pleasant times she used to spend chatting with Giddy.

Now she must go to town alone. Eleanor is quite weary of her own society by the time she arrives at Madame Faustine's in Bond Street.

She wonders if Carol received the little note she penned in such trepidation yesterday, imploring him to spare her the passionate scenes in which he indulged the previous evening. She asked him in the most pathetic terms never to cross her path in life again, because she was only a weak little woman, and ended by saying she would be at 19, Bond Street, the next morning, and hoped not to run across that horrid Mrs. Mounteagle.

As she is bowed out by an elegant maiden in black satin, a hand is laid on her arm, a sense of exhilaration possesses her, while Mr. Quinton's melodious voice whispers "Eleanor" in her ear.

"I asked you not to," she says feebly, ill concealing her pleasurable surprise.

"But you laid temptation in my way, and it was strong," he answers.

She recalls his passionate words breathed in the firelight,

"Oh! love—my love!"

the words that held her paralysed, and seemed in a single syllable to divorce her from her husband.

"What are we going to do?" asks Carol.

"*We!* I must return to Lyndhurst and boredom. An old lady at Twickenham Park has asked me to tea this afternoon, and I have to interview a kitchen-maid at half-past two."

Her voice is a little hard, there is a ring of sarcasm and rebellion in it that is strange to Eleanor.

"Have you ever been to the Savoy?"

"No."

"Let us lunch there; it is past one," urges Carol Quinton.

He hails a hansom, though Eleanor is reluctant.

"I really can't," she whispers.

"There is no harm, dear," he replies persuasively.

The cabman is watching her; she feels confused, uncertain.

Then his influence is too strong, and Eleanor succumbs.

Where is the harm? She is a married woman, she can go if she pleases.

He helps her into the hansom, and they spin away.

"Do you remember last time we drove together," he asks.

"Yes, from the Butterflies' Club."

"It was dark then, Eleanor."

Her eyes droop, an embarrassed flush dyes her cheek.

"I am Mrs. Roche," she stammers.

"But 'Eleanor' is such a beautiful name, so queenly. You have poisoned all my happiness since the fatal night when I first saw you."

"I would willingly give it back, every shred of shattered joy, if I could."

"You could if you would."

"How?"

"By being kind, by taking me back to favour, and forgiving me."

"It looks as if I had done that already."

"But only in a hesitating, half-hearted manner."

"It is far easier for me to forgive," says Eleanor, "than for you to accept my forgiveness and not err again."

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There is silence between them for some moments.

"If I could think you cared for me just a little, Eleanor, I would be a better man."

"No," she said, biting her lips, and struggling with intense emotion; "you must reform without my aid—it will be harder, and therefore nobler. I do *not* 'care' for you."

He sees the efforts these words are costing her.

"I don't believe that, Eleanor."

"Then in disbelieving me you put me on a par with a common liar," she says hotly.

"Oh, no," he replies with his wan smile; "it is one of 'the social lies that warp us from the living truth.'"

They are turning into the Savoy courtyard.

Eleanor alights, half pleased, half frightened at her daring.

She feels very strange as she enters the huge restaurant with Carol.

It is a full day, and he points her out several celebrities as they pass to their table.

"This is the one, sir," says the waiter, "for two," removing an engaged card on Eleanor's plate.

"How was this table reserved for us?" she asks Mr. Quinton. "We seemed expected."

"I wired for it this morning," he answers tenderly. "I knew you would be in town, and I meant you to come!"

"It is very wrong of me," she sighs, and her eyes glisten as if washed by still rains under her lashes. "Do you know, I have a calendar in my room, and every morning I pull off a leaf to read the motto. I have just remembered the quotation for to-day."

"What was it?" he asks

Eleanor bends her head over her *hors d'œuvre*.

"The stately flower of female fortitude—of perfect wifehood."

Eleanor alights.

"Ah!" he sighs, "Tennyson."

"Yes," says Mrs. Roche.

Her eyes glance round the room.

How many bright eyes glisten over their champagne, and merry tongues joke and laugh away the hours!

"I like to look at people and make histories of them," says Eleanor.

"That girl with the flaxen hair, next to the dark man on your right, was a ballet girl before she married Sir Frederick Thurston. Everybody prophesied that her high kick would lift her into the aristocracy when she first gained favour. Her name was Poppy Poppleton, and people think she poisoned her husband and let another woman swing for it."

"Why do you tell me these horrible things," murmurs Eleanor. "They are not conducive to appetite."

"Forgive me, but you started by being morbid, quoting at me in fact, and you look so distractingly lovely when you are shocked."

"To tell a woman she is lovely is to criticise her openly to her face. Please do not make such a careful perusal of my expression."

"Unfortunately I am endowed with the critical faculty."

The very intonation of Quinton's voice is a caress.

His eyes seem to reveal, as they gaze on her, their power of insight and analysis. Their look is appreciation, their sympathy with her every utterance boundless.

To him she is not only a character study, but a woman to love, to worship, for a day, an hour.

To her he is an object of fascination, an accomplished man of the world, one who can make himself utterly irresistible by reason of his tenderness, chivalry, courtesy, and devotion.

A magnetic attraction rises between them. Eleanor forgets her surroundings. She only remembers him.

At last her eyes fall on the door, and remain transfixed in that direction.

Giddy Mounteagle, in a costume of wide black and white stripes and leopard's skin cloak, followed by her youthful *fiancé*, enters the restaurant.

"Bad luck!" exclaims Eleanor, turning to Carol; "look!"

He re-echoes her deep sigh as Giddy advances.

"I hate her seeing me here with you," Mrs. Roche declares. "She is a bad enemy, and now that we are hardly on speaking terms I dare not think what horrible stories she may not spread against me."

"Why not make it up, for the sake of our friendship, Eleanor? She could often help us to meet, you know?"

"Never, after the way she treated me!" declares Mrs. Roche, drawing herself up as Mrs. Mounteagle approaches.

"Hullo! *you* here?" she cries in rather a bantering, insolent tone, and raising her finely pencilled eyebrows till they are lost to view under her fringe. She pats Carol playfully on the shoulder, pretending not to notice the stiffness of Eleanor's bow.

Bertie shakes hands with Mrs. Roche, and they seat themselves at the next table.

Eleanor turns her back, and becomes deeply interested in what Carol is telling her. They talk loudly on politics for Giddy's benefit.

"How spiteful she looked," whispers Eleanor at last.

"Oh, I don't know. You see you gave her the cold shoulder a bit."

"Do you think she noticed it?"

"Rather. She is as sharp as a needle."

"I think her hat is atrocious. It makes me tremble when I remember how I relied on her taste. Those enormous black and white feathers, pinned in crazy fashion with paste brooches, are horribly vulgar."

"Do you see that red-headed man just coming in?" says Carol.

"Yes. Who is he?"

"Eccott—a tremendously wealthy man, and a great financier. I expect your husband knows him."

"Eccott—why, of course! I have often heard Philip speak of him. The name is quite familiar to me, and now

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"Phillip Roche is here!"

I come to think of it he is living here at the Savoy. Philip often dines with him."

"And lunches?" asks Quinton hastily.

Eccott is speaking to the head waiter, and evidently looking for a friend.

Eleanor can see down the long passage. Suddenly her heart sinks; the palms of her hands grow cold.

"Philip is there!" she says under her breath.

"What will you do?" whispers Quinton.

"I—I don't know."

"Tell Giddy," he urges; "make the quarrel up now, take her into your confidence, pretend you are together."

"Place myself in her hands? Oh, Carol, it would be too humiliating!"

Involuntarily she calls him by his Christian name.

"Self-justification is so embarrassing and unsatisfactory, and some excuse must be made for our appearing here together, unless you take my advice. He has not seen you yet, there is still time."

Thus Quinton urges the unwilling Eleanor to follow his suggestion.

"But I can't," she declares, half crying. "What will Giddy think of me? What will she say?"

"Shall I speak to her for you?"

"Oh! if you only would."

Philip is still talking outside in the passage to Mr. Eccott.

Carol rises, leans over the back of Mrs. Mounteagle's chair whispering hurriedly:

"Philip Roche is here. I don't want him to see his wife with me. Take her under your wing. I will make it worth your while."

Giddy takes the cue instantly. Such compromising situations are not new to her. She is a Machiavelli in petticoats.

"Here, Bertie," she says, "slip into Eleanor's chair, and stop at that table with Mr. Quinton."

She turns, smiles benignly upon Mrs. Roche, and motions her to take the empty seat.

"There, my dear," she murmurs, as Eleanor, confused and ashamed, obeys. "Let bygones be bygones, you are with me to-day. I brought you up to town."

"No, you met me by chance at Madame Faustine's, and we came on here together. Oh! Giddy, how good you are."

"A friend in need, eh? Finish Bertie's fruit salad. Good gracious, you are drinking whiskey and soda. Pass me his glass, it won't matter for me."

Eleanor hands it over with trembling fingers.

Philip is well in the room now, and any moment may see them.

"Would it not look well to attract his attention; sign to him? He is bound to spot you in a minute. Here is the waiter, we will send him. Waiter! go and ask that tall gentleman to come here. Say two ladies wish to speak to him."

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Mr. Roche advances in surprise. He is vastly annoyed to find his wife again in company with Mrs. Mounteagle.

"You did not expect to see me, Philip," she says, assuming an air of gaiety to cover her confusion.

"I discovered your wife at our mutual costumier in Bond Street," cries Giddy. "I know she always starves herself when shopping alone in town, so persuaded her to make a good lunch with me. I have known her exist a whole day on prawns and ices, or Bath buns with lemonade. So you owe me a debt of gratitude, Mr. Roche. We are lucky in having run across you, and two other friends," as Philip's eyes fall on Carol Quinton, and the insipid Bertie. "We are simply gobbling our food whole, as we are going to the International Fur Store. I want to try and get a muff of leopard's skin to match my cape, for which, alas! I have still to write a cheque. But we are keeping you standing, and Mr. Eccott is waiting for his guest."

"Don't be late home, Eleanor," he says, "it gets very cold and foggy, and you still have a cough."

The two women watch him move away, then their eyes meet.

"You are a brick, Giddy," gasps Mrs. Roche, squeezing her hand under the table. "What makes you so splendidly loyal to me?"

"Life is so short, dear, it is well to be kind when we can. Besides, I am very fond of you though we did quarrel. I think it will draw us closer together."

"She lied to me—you lied to me!"

"I shall never forget what you have done for me to-day."

As the four friends leave the restaurant Carol Quinton bends over Giddy, and says sincerely:

"Bravo! and thanks a thousand times. You acted to perfection."

"Glad you think so," she replies in an undertone; "and, my friend, *you* can go to the fur store now, and settle my little account."

She pointed to her cloak as she spoke, and added saucily:

"The muff can stand over till the next time."

* * * * * *

"So you have made it up with the Mounteagle woman," says Philip that evening, pulling fiercely at his moustache.

"Well, you see, it was *so* difficult not to, meeting at the dressmaker's. I can't describe to you how awkwardly I was placed. I have felt more uncomfortable to-day than I have done for years. She practically took me by storm, and was so kind and nice it quite touched me. I have gone back to my old opinion of her. She may be a little hot tempered, but means well."

"It is a thousand pities. I hoped you had done with her for good. I don't like you going to the Savoy with her dressed up in that gaudy fashion. She looks quite remarkable and unladylike. Besides that fellow Quinton is always at her heels, and I have heard some strange things about him. But then he is just the style of man people like the widow affect."

"What have you heard about Mr. Quinton?"

"Oh, never mind; nothing for your ears, my dear."

"Here is the post," says Eleanor with a sigh of relief. She is glad for the introduction of letters to turn the subject.

"Only one for me," turning the envelope over. "I really dare not open it."

"Why? Who is it from?"

"That insatiable Madame Faustine. It will be the bill for my black tea-gown and the blue silk blouse that you admired so much, Philip, dear. Now you may have this letter, and pay it yourself if you are awfully good," laughing merrily. "I will give you the number of sovereigns in kisses."

She looked so pretty as she handed it him that he tore it open leniently, but no bill fell out.

The letter ran thus:

Madam,—I am writing to ask you a personal favour, with regard to Mrs. Mounteagle, who kindly introduced me to you. I was prevented mentioning it to you to-day by the presence of my assistant. Could you induce Mrs. Mounteagle to remit me a portion, at least, of her long outstanding account? She has not been lately to our establishment, and I cannot get my letters answered. I thought perhaps you might use your influence, and oblige me very greatly.

Yours respectfully,

Louise Faustine.

"A thousand devils!" cried Philip, crushing the letter in his hand. "She lied to me—*you* lied to me!"

(To be continued.)

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No. 3 ON SALE FEBRUARY 29TH.

HERE ARE A FEW OF THE MANY INTERESTING FEATURES IT CONTAINS:

Stories by Stanley J. Weyman, Robert Barr, F. Frankfort Moore, etc., etc.; "The Bravest Deed I Ever Saw," by Lady Henry Somerset; Leaders of London Society, Illustrated by Photographs; The Chapel of Bones; First Attempts at Photography, etc., etc.

THE NUMBER IS LUXURIOUSLY ILLUSTRATED THROUGHOUT BY THE BEST ARTISTS OF THE DAY.

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A Judas Kiss.

THE northern plains of Siberia were experiencing a far more vigorous winter than usual, even for that latitude. The snow, fanned by a strong northern gale, fell in wild, curling eddies across the ice-bound, desolate plains, wrapping the wooden houses of the convict mining station of O—— in a feathery mantle of immaculate white.

In one of these houses nearest the mine dwelt the head of the settlement, by name Nicholas Ozaski, and his daughter Feodora. The latter, when our tale opens, was sitting beside a roaring fire in her home, while on the opposite side of the hearth was a young Cossack lieutenant, tall and strikingly handsome, so much so, indeed, that his face had won for him the cognomen of Handsome Boris.

Boris Xerinka had been at O—— for the space of one week only, and yet Feodora had become to him what the pipe is to the habitual smoker, viz., he could not live without her; such was the result of five days' reasoning with himself, but Feodora, who was quite accustomed to receive homage, did not or would not understand that he expected her to offer him any; moreover, for some unaccountable reason, she had conceived a rooted antipathy for him, a dislike which at first was generated by a shifty expression which seemed to lurk behind his bright blue eyes, as well as by the downward curve of his handsome mouth, which would have better graced a woman's face than that of a man.

For some time the two occupants of the room had remained silent, watching the glowing embers, then Feodora, raising her head, glanced at Boris, and said:

"My father told me that another band of those poor wretches was expected here to-day. Is that so?"

"Yes," replied Xerinka, "it is true, Feodora, and they ought to have been here eight hours ago!"

"Doomed to the mines," she cried in a dull voice, as though speaking to herself. "Poor creatures! I wonder their hearts do not stop beating when they hear their sentence; but yet they live on, only dimly conscious of the worse than death which awaits them. The tales of those who have escaped from this Russian prison land cannot portray the fearful fate into which they march. But alas! when they arrive they experience the grim realism of those tales. Ah, how I wish I had never left St. Petersburg."

A moment's silence followed this heartfelt ejaculation, then Boris said gently:

"Feodora, would you be pleased if you knew you were about to return to Russia's capital?"

"*Pleased!*" She rose from her chair in surprise. "Pleased were but an empty name for the *joy* I should experience. Are—are we leaving here?"

"Well, your father has not quite decided," was the answer. "I have received orders which recall me to St. Petersburg eight days hence, and—Feodora, you could leave here as my wife!"

For a second she looked coldly at him, and then in a loud voice she said:

"Do you jest?"

"No, by Heaven, I am in deadly earnest! Feodora, I have not known you long, but just a week—and yet when I received my orders this morning I cursed them, for it would necessitate my leaving O—— and *you!* but I must obey the Tsar, and I cannot bear to part, perhaps for ever, with you!"

She relented on hearing his earnest tone of voice, and said more gently:

"Have you thought of my father?"

"He has consented."

"Indeed! It is very kind of him to do so, I am sure," she continued sarcastically. "But what if I in my turn say no?"

Boris clutched the arms of his chair and stared aghast at her for a moment, then, giving a sigh of relief, he continued in a reassured tone of voice:

"For a second I thought you were in earnest; it was a cruel jest."

"What if I say I do not jest?"

"Ah! stop these cruel questions in mercy. You would not have let me call you Feodora if you—you did not entertain some regard for me."

"In Siberia one forgets conventionality."

"What!" exclaimed Boris in a dazed voice, rising to his feet. "Do you——"

"Hush!" interrupted Feodora. "Hearken to my tale, and then you will know *one* of my reasons for refusing you. Four years ago I was in St. Petersburg

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there, at a ball, I met a young Russian noble; we fell in love with each other, and in two months we were engaged. By some unlucky occurrence my father quarrelled with him, broke off the engagement, and brought me with him here, despite my pleadings and those of my aunt (with whom I was staying), in order that I should not see him again. How can I marry you, as I am engaged? Go to St. Petersburg, forget me, and wed some other who would be better able to appreciate you than I should."

"If he were dead would you marry me?" asked Boris, laying his hand on the hilt of his sword. "Say yes, and give me his name and address; I will insult him—he will be forced to challenge me then——"

A bugle call rang out at this moment, followed by hoarse orders and the neighing of horses.

"The convicts!" cried Feodora, as she walked swiftly towards the window followed by Boris, just in time to see them file past.

They were a motley band of men, women, aye, and children, too; manacled, footsore, haggard, and with despair imprinted on their faces. They marched on through the driving snow, urged forwards ever and anon by the lash. It was a sight to cause the hardest heart to quail.

"Well, Feodora, what is your answer?" cried Boris, as he looked out of the window.

She did not reply, for her gaze had rested on the tall soldier-like figure of one of the convicts, who started when he saw her, and stood still in surprise until a soldier riding up raised his whip, the next instant it descended, curling round the prisoner like a writhing snake.

Feodora cried out in sympathy, while the convict once more moved haltingly onwards.

"Come away," said Boris, "your heart is too tender to behold such sights as these, although the curs deserve their treatment."

"Deserve!" cried Feodora, turning her flashing eyes on him. "By what right do you set yourself up as a judge of your fellow men?"

"They have been condemned by Russian law," hazarded Boris.

"Condemned by Russian law," she echoed with a bitter laugh. "But there—go! I feel faint—go!"

"Your answer, Feodora! Do not say——"

"You will have it in a week," she replied; then she continued: "But go—leave me—alone."

There was such an accent of pleading in her voice that Boris left her presence without uttering a word. As soon as she was alone she buried her face in her hands and cried in a voice broken by sobs: "Alexis! oh Alexis, to think that you should have come to this." Then, clenching her fists, she exclaimed, rising from her chair:

"But you shall not work in the mines, for I will save you! Ah, but how?" she cried in agony. "I am only a woman, alas! but what strength cannot accomplish cunning must."

With a groan of despair she returned once more to the window. Towards her from the road to the mine advanced four men under the guard of Boris. Strangely enough, the tall, soldier-like figure was amongst them. Once again he halted, when Xerinka, drawing his sword, struck him with the flat side of it so furiously as to stretch him almost senseless to the ground. It was then for the first time that the young lieutenant became aware that he was in front of Feodora's house, and that she had witnessed his action. He bit his lip with vexation.

A moment later Feodora, regardless of the biting cold, was in the street. Darting a furious glance at Xerinka, she knelt down in the snow beside the prostrate convict, then turning her flashing eyes on Boris, she bade him leave her presence. Scarcely knowing what he did, he obeyed, and marched a good six yards away with his three prisoners. It was not far, yet the swiftly falling snow blotted them out from her gaze; then, taking the man's head on her knee, she whispered in his ear:

"Alexis!"

The convict opened his eyes, and exclaimed in a low voice:

"Feodora, dearest, you recognised me!"

"Could I not penetrate *any disguise!* I have come to save you!"

"Save me?" he echoed dully. "Who can be saved from the mines?"

"Hush!" whispered she. "Do you know where you are to be lodged of a night?"

"Yes. The usual prison being full, we are to be placed in a little hut just outside this hamlet for a short time, until a band of the prisoners here are sent back to Tobolsk *en route* for elsewhere."

Feodora uttered a low glad cry on hearing this intelligence, and replied in a low, excited whisper:

"Be ready to fly on the fifth night from now—to fly with me!"

"But how——"

"Hush! Don't question me, dearest, but trust all to me; only be ready on the fifth night; and now pretend to be recovering from a faint, for here they come."

She spoke the truth, for Boris, realising that he had no right to leave a convict unguarded, was returning. Feodora rose, and with well simulated wrath, cried:

"So you have come to fetch your prisoner. It is no thanks to you that he has recovered consciousness." Then, taking him on one side, she exclaimed, as Alexis staggered to his feet: "Should it come to my ears that you have struck another convict as brutally as you did that man, I will never give you my answer!"

A happy smile irradiated his face, and, calling to some soldiers who had just come up, he bade them conduct the convicts to their prison. As soon as they had gone Boris cried passionately:

"Feodora, I implore you to give me your answer now."

"In five days you shall have it."

"But why this delay—why keep me in this cruel suspense?"

"As a punishment for your barbarity," she replied coldly; then she added: "and also to test your courage, for it is whispered here that you are but a coward at heart."

"Set me any task, however perilous it may be, and you will see if I cannot give the lie direct to the circulators of such a rumour."

"You know the tale of that convict who was kicked to death, whose spirit, it is said, haunts the house in which he died? Well, my father told me that the prisoners are going to be kept there."

"Only those four," interrupted Boris.

"If you keep guard alone there on the *fifth night from now*, I will give you my answer. This is the task I set you."

Like most Russians, Xerinka was superstitious. He would not have feared to meet a mortal foe or brave a danger, but to meet perhaps the spirit of the convict whose death some laid at his door made him draw back—he hesitated to accept the challenge.

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"So this is the way you give the lie direct to those who, it appears, speak the truth," she said sneeringly, and moving away. "Coward!"

"Stay!" cried Boris, laying a detaining hand on her arm, "do not accuse me of cowardice before you have heard my answer."

"And it is?"

"That I shall be there!"

* * * * *

It is midnight, and the convict station of O—— is wrapped in repose. No sound disturbs the stillness, for the snow deadens even the footsteps of the sentries outside the common prison, and those of Lieutenant Xerinka, who, armed with bayonet and rifle, keeps his strange vigil outside the hut wherein the four convicts are imprisoned.

For the hundredth time Boris strives to pierce the gloom to see if she whom he awaits comes; in vain, Feodora is late in keeping her tryst.

A sudden fear chills his heart as the idea flashes across his brain that she may not come, but a rustle of garments quiets his fears. In an instant he was on guard and had challenged.

"It is I—Feodora."

"You, dearest! I almost feared you would not come," he exclaimed, flinging down his rifle.

"Not come, Boris?" there was a wondering tone in her voice. "Did I not say I should; how did you get permission for keeping guard?"

"They thought I was mad," he answered, as she approached him, "but they granted my request though. Colonel Stanuff had a good laugh at my expense, and now having *granted* your strange demand, darling—what—what is your answer?" The question was asked haltingly.

"I have been thinking and reasoning for five days, as you know, Boris, and have at last arrived at my decision."

"And that is——?"

"Yes."

"Ah, Feodora, what an angel you are!" he cried impetuously, "and what relief you have brought to my mind." Then suddenly checking himself, he added: "But how can I tell you are not amusing yourself at my expense, as you have so often done?"

A moment's pause, during which her hand sought the hilt of a dagger at her girdle; then throwing back her furs, she said softly:

"Let my first kiss be the seal of the truth of my answer!"

She flung herself into his outstretched arms, and raised her face to his. The instant their lips met a foot of steel at the same moment was driven to its hilt into his heart, and Boris fell without a groan at his deceiver's feet.

With nervous fingers she took the keys from his girdle, his blood staining her white fur gloves as she did so, and with trembling hands she unfastened the door of the hut.

A few seconds later the manacles fell from Alexis' wrists, and he was free, his release being followed by that of his companions.

"Oh, Feodora, my darling!" he cried, taking her into his arms, and kissing her passionately. "One may hear of men who have dared all for those they love, and yet how little one hears of the heroism and devotedness of your sex. How can I and my comrades, who are free from every taint of guilt, thank you who have so haply saved us—poor victims of the bureaucracy?"

"By following me, dearest," she said in a low, hurried voice. "All is prepared, a sledge awaits us outside the village; my old servant Moutcha drives, so don't be afraid when you see him."

Once more he kissed her flushed cheek, and then his three companions in turn took her gloved hand and held it reverently in dumb gratitude and respect.

Outside the hut they halted, and, perceiving the body of the dead lover of Feodora, Alexis exclaimed:

"Of a truth, my love, you have a clever little head, but you have forgotten one thing."

"And that is?"

"To divest him of his weapons," he continued, doing so himself as he spoke.

Five minutes later they were speeding noiselessly westwards.

* * * * *

But little remains to be told. After countless dangers the party reached England three months later. Two of them were subsequently pardoned and returned to Russia; a third lives in Paris; while Count Alexis Pattowa and his lovely wife live within two miles of Hyde Park, and often when alone in their drawing-room the Count imprints a kiss on his wife's fair brow, whispering as he does so the sinister word:

"*Siberia!*"

Tristam Monke.

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The Gods of Jules Hirschler

Jules Hirschler made his money diamond mining in South Africa. His connection was with a firm in Hatton Garden, and his knowledge of diamonds in the rough being unequalled, he soon became a wealthy man.

All the Kaffir's thieving propensities were well known to him. He was a sharp master, keen-witted, though quick-tempered, feared, yet respected.

Every precaution against robbery that could possibly be devised, had been taken by Hirschler, and even the one Kaffir servant whom he almost grew to trust, was never allowed to be tempted.

Still his master commissioned him to keep a sharp look out for the other thieves, and on more than one occasion his services had been invaluable.

Of late Jules Hirschler's fortune had been accumulating rapidly, the last stone which came into his possession being one of the most valuable he had ever seen. He gave the large sum of £10,000 for this precious rough jewel, knowing he should get five times that amount for it when cut.

He was seated at his desk examining the stone, his heart swelled with gratification, as he laid it down, and gazed with admiring eyes at what would one day be a thing of rarest beauty and most lustrous light.

It had been carefully under lock and key until this minute, but was now about to be taken by Hirschler to the bank for safe conduit to England.

No previous gem had given him the wild delight, the feverish exultation, with which his present prize inspired him. That cloudy crystal seemed to fire his brain, sap his reason. He was like a heathen gazing on his gaudy god, in mental adoration. So wrapped was he in contemplation, that for a moment he did not hear the stealthy footsteps of Joe, his Kaffir servant, enter the room. As his eyes caught the man's reflection in a mirror on the wall, he clutched the stone involuntarily. The feel of its cool surface in his heated palm was sweet.

Joe's head was turned in the opposite direction, he was looking evidently for his master in the verandah beyond.

"Joe has not seen," thought Hirschler, "it is quite safe."

He hastily slipped the stone in a side drawer of his desk for temporary cover, and called to Joe.

"Want anything?"

The Kaffir advanced.

A man with fine stones had come to see the "Boss," and was seeking entrance of Joe.

The intelligence was welcome to Jules Hirschler, he never lost the opportunity of a deal.

Bargaining, and the making of profits, was his second nature, dear to him as the life blood in his veins.

He ordered Joe to show the man in, and was soon eagerly scrutinising the contents of his pocket-book.

They were undoubtedly good specimens. Jules Hirschler examined the gems with knowing eyes—crossing to the window, the light of which was needed to see and value them. Some slight argument ensued between the two men, while Hirschler drove the bargain, which engrossed his whole soul.

Eventually the deal was carried through to the satisfaction of both parties, for Jules was fair, and offered a good price.

"I've something there in my desk which I *must* show you," he said, his eyes sparkling as he turned from the window, and the man strapped up his empty pocket-book. "You will appreciate it, you are a connoisseur like myself. I had it out just as you arrived, and slipped it in here for the time being."

The stranger watched him stoop down, open the drawer with a sigh of conscious pride, then stagger back with a smothered oath.

"The dickens! it's gone!"

His knees knocked together, he clutched the chair for support.

"Gone! impossible! We have not left the room."

Jules drew himself together, rearing his head like a tower of strength, in which his eyes gleamed dangerously. His white lips and even teeth were clenched, the breath came hotly like fire through his nostrils. He had been robbed of his chief idol, the smaller gods were there, but all of them put together could not pay for the loss of that superlative treasure.

"Joe, my Kaffir servant," he hissed. "The only man that has been in the room, yet how, and when?"

"He must have shown consummate skill in extracting it," replied the merchant, "probably when our backs were turned a moment, at the window; these fellows are sharp, one never knows!"

"I'll get it back if it costs me——"

But Jules did not finish his sentence, or the stranger missed it, as the outraged man rushed in a frenzy from the room, calling loudly for Joe.

The voice resounded like thunder, vibrated with intensity. It was that of a being unhumanised by fury,

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yelling here, there, everywhere, for the servant that answered not.

The diamonds he had bought rattled in the depths of his pockets, as he hastened madly through the grounds, still with the name of Joe on his frozen lips.

At last he reached the Kaffir's hut, and entered breathlessly, to find the man bending over a white child. It was a nameless infant, born of some unknown parentage, which a year ago had been left on Hirschler's doorstep, and commended by him to the care of his servant.

The baby was moaning pitifully, while Joe, endeavouring to check its screams, appeared engrossed in the plastering up of a wound in its leg.

Jules grasped him by the throat.

"Come here, you dog," he cried, dragging him to the door. "Give up the diamond, or you are a dead man. Quick!" drawing a revolver, and pointing it in the Kaffir's eyes. "Where is it?"

Joe fell on his knees, and grovelled at Hirschler's feet, vowing his innocence, beating his brow, and kissing his master's boots.

The child, he said, had been heard screaming, having cut his leg, for which reason he left the house. He knew nothing of the diamond—nothing!

Thus he swore again and again, while Jules still threatened him with his revolver if he would not disclose.

"No one entered the room but you," he said sternly. "If you prevaricate you *die!*"

Still the wailing of the child within re-echoed round the hut.

Gradually Jules Hirschler's temper was mastering him; Joe's denial lashed his rage to madness. The thought of the lost fortune tortured his money-loving nature—one word from this whimpering cur might give it back, but he was obstinate as the stones on which he crouched, disclaiming all knowledge.

A volley of curses broke from his lips, his desperate fingers pulled the trigger, and Joe rolled over on the threshold, dead.

As he watched his servant's blood trickle under his feet, dyeing the soles of his boots a dull red, he drew back with a shudder.

Jules' ungovernable temper had overruled his better instincts, which were not by nature brutal.

The sight of the stiff body on the ground revolted him. Yet still he thought chiefly of the lost diamond.

Calling all his men, Jules personally superintended the searching of the hut, which they ransacked high and low, but with fruitless results. Finally the body of Joe himself, now strongly suspected of being the receptacle, was put to the test, yet still in vain, the stone was not there.

The seeds of remorse, which always followed a violent fit of temper, were springing up in Hirschler's heart.

He saw the staring eyes of the dead looking reproachfully at him, and heard in fancy the cry of innocence break afresh from lips that could speak no more.

Then in the presence of that ghastly mutilated form, the wailing of the child in pain reached Jules Hirschler's ears.

He found it with its leg carefully bound and plastered by the foster father's clever hands, and regret mingled with his pity.

The waif ceased crying as Jules bent over it, and held out two chubby arms, dimpled and sunburnt, to the red handed murderer.

"Poor little chap!" said the man, lifting the infant carefully not to hurt its injured limb.

"I suppose I must take you home with me, now Joe is dead!"

He walked slowly to his house, bearing the white child against his heart, with a strange thrill of sentiment, new to Jules Hirschler.

It was the only way he could atone for the life he had taken that day.

* * * * * *

As time wore on, no sign of the stolen diamond!

The memory of it lingered painfully in Hirschler's mind, some people said he never quite got over its loss.

No such stone again fell in his way, and the precious brilliant, lost to the world, would probably lie till doomsday in its undiscovered hiding-place.

The child grew healthy and beautiful. Jules, a self-made man, with deep-seated admiration for blue blood, marvelled at the aristocratic features and apparent good breeding of the boy, whom he adopted for his son.

The wound in his leg healed rapidly, and to outward appearances seemed well enough, yet in after years Walter often complained of the pain it gave him.

"Yes, I still suffer from the old cut," he would tell Hirschler, when questioned on the subject. "From time to time it's pretty bad, and then I can't feel it for months. It's a good thing I am not lame, but it never affects my walk."

Walter had heard the story of poor Joe's untimely end and the missing diamond frequently, but he loved old Hirschler none the less for his hasty temper, which always remained his bane.

"You know, my boy," he told Walter, "the diamonds are often called my 'gods,' but sometimes I think they must be my devils, when I remember poor Kaffir Joe."

At the age of twelve Jules took his adopted son to England, and sent him to Cheltenham college, himself settling in the old country to enjoy the fortune his gods had brought him.

He was proud of the handsome lad, and had great ideas already concerning his future.

Walter was an immense favourite wherever he went—passed easily into the army from Sandhurst, and rejoiced Jules Hirschler's heart with his polished manners and gentlemanly bearing.

"He's the right sort, he is," Hirschler confided to a colonial chum. "Walter does me credit, and I'm grateful to him for it. I like to see him in his swagger regimentals, hobnobbing with all the swells. I mean him to make a grand match, as my heir he will be gilded enough for a duchess. He's not a bit carried away with it all, but just as frank and open and affectionate to his old dad as when I nursed him on my knee in his infancy. He knows, too, what I most desire, and will remember my wishes as sure as I stand here. 'Marry into the aristocracy, my boy,' I said. 'That is what I expect; now you know how you can please me.'"

"And he will do it, too," replied Jules' friend, "if I know the stuff he's made of."

Walter would have gladly have realised any reasonable expectations of the man who brought him up and launched him on the seas of life. But it happened at this time that he found himself strangely attracted by Mabel Forest, an impecunious country parson's daughter, with the softest grey eyes, and the sweetest voice he had ever heard. Walter had met many society dames and ballroom coquettes, but none of them quickened the pulses of his heart.

Lady Susan with the seraphic smile and brilliant

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teeth, amused him for an hour, he rode with her sisters, and dined her father at his club. He met the old aristocratic family of B——'s from Staffordshire, and sent the prettiest daughter half-a-dozen bouquets. But beyond the casual civilities, the little attentions of life, Walter troubled himself but slightly, and gave scant worship at the shrine of these proud beauties.

Mabel Forest.

Not until Mabel Forest came into his vision did passion, in its true and most forcible sense, possess the young man's being.

She was gentle, lovable, all that seemed best and purest in his eyes; her virtue and freshness, her dowry, her lack of fortune her only vice.

Jules Hirschler, his ideas and ambitions were forgotten. In Walter's opinion a *mariage de convenance* had always been distasteful.

He went in his blind rapture to Mabel Forest, poured out the tale of his love, felt her warm lips meet his own, and knew he was victorious. Yet that Mabel should love one so utterly unworthy amazed, bewildered him! He could hardly believe his good fortune in winning such a prize!

His happiness seemed almost too great to last, and like a cloud on a fair sky, the thought of Jules Hirschler swept over his mind.

"Marry into the aristocracy, my boy. That is what I expect."

The words came back with unpleasant force, the only return that Hirschler asked for all that he had given this nameless waif and stray. It smote upon his conscience, even as he held Mabel to his heart, and felt the delirious ecstasy of love's first passion. He would give up all, if need be, for the sake of a woman. What will men not do, when the madness is upon them.

He basked in the light of her lustrous eyes, he swore fidelity till death, and left her in the seventh Heaven of bliss, with a prayer of thankfulness for the treasure God had given him.

Then Walter returned to his reputed father's house in Piccadilly, where he was greeted with the ever-ready welcome, dined in first-rate style, and generally made much of.

During the evening he broached the subject of his marriage to Jules Hirschler.

"I have met the only girl I can ever love," he declared, gazing adoringly through a cloud of smoke, as if he saw her face.

A thrill of expectation ran through Hirschler's veins.

"At last!" he said with a sigh of approval, never dreaming Walter would disappoint him. "Well my boy, *who* is she?"

He leant forward eagerly, with the look in his eyes that Walter had only seen when Jules was examining a very fine diamond in its rough state. They glistened like crystals, and were expressive of intense excitement.

"Mabel Forest," stammered the young man, growing red under the anxious scrutiny.

"Never heard of her," declared Jules, involuntarily turning to the peerage; "got a handle to her name, eh?"

"No," retorted Walter, with a toss of his handsome head. "Plain Mabel Forest of Brackgreen Vicarage. Her father is a clergyman, they have no money," speaking defiantly, "nor title, but they are good simple people. There is nothing against them."

For the moment Jules Hirschler was speechless, while the evil temper, as fierce and uncontrollable in age as youth, welled up. At last he found his voice; it shook with elaborate disdain.

"A country parson's daughter!" he sneered. "So *this* is your grand match, your duchess!" with a low laugh, "this the wedding that was to connect you with the upper circles, and give us both a footing in Society. It was the one thing I stipulated for when I put you in the Lancers, and made you my heir. A pretty show of gratitude!"

"Oh! father," he cried, but the old man sprang to his feet and checked the words on Walter's tongue.

"No excuses, *no* explanations. If you regret your foolhardy conduct, give her up, I'll pay to get you out of it."

These words roused the young lover's ire.

"*Pay* Mabel!" he thundered, "what do you take her for?"

"A scheming minx who is after your money."

The words seemed blasphemous to Walter. He quivered with indignation.

"Nothing on earth shall come between us," he muttered with set teeth. "If I have to break stones on the road to buy my bread."

And knew he was victorious.

This sounded to Jules like a challenge.

"You need not look to *me* for help," he cried, the purple hue upon his face, indicative of his worst mood. "If you marry this girl you won't get my money, not a farthing of it, sir! Please understand that!"

For a moment Walter looked stunned, standing

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speechless, staring at the angry light in Hirschler's eyes.

Then he bowed his head in assent.

"You pig-headed young idiot!" roared Jules, hoarse with suppressed passion. "Can't you see what an ass you're making of yourself, ruining your career, hurling yourself against a brick wall?"

"Thank you," replied Walter, drawing himself up, with a curl of lip. "I have chosen Mabel Forest, and I mean to stick to her."

He walked to the door proud and erect.

Jules Hirschler shook his fist threateningly at the retreating figure.

"It's ridiculous! it's infernal impudence!" he cried. "Get out of my house till you come to your senses."

Walter paused, scanning his foster father from head to foot disdainfully.

"Yes," he said, "I'll get out of your house, but I'll go to Mabel Forest!"

Then he turned and slammed the door, while Jules Hirschler staggered back into his chair with something like a groan.

* * * * *

A strange loneliness crept over the house in Piccadilly the night that Walter left.

Jules Hirschler, stubborn and relentless, heard his footsteps in the hall, the footman's whistle for a hansom, and then the closing of a heavy door.

He started to his feet, and creeping, as if ashamed, to the window, peered round the corner of the blind.

The numerous vehicles confused him, he could not tell in which the boy he had loved as a son was driving away.

All he knew was that he had gone, hounded from his home by a storm of hasty words, for the love of a simple woman. The thought sickened Jules Hirschler, he felt as he had done on the day when he shot Joe, and carried the child home in a fit of remorse and self-reproach. These evil tempers always left him feeling faint and ill. He rang for brandy and soda, and flung aside a half-smoked cigar that had turned like hay to his taste.

He sank on to the sofa wearied by the tempest, limp as a man who has wrestled against a mighty wind.

"Thank you," replied Walter.

The reaction from fiercest choler to calm was always rapid in Jules Hirschler's case, and left him the more unnerved. But his pride was such that, after the attack, he would not own to his irascibility. Nothing could induce him to hold out the olive branch unasked, though even before daylight broke over the great city he yearned to undo the night's work.

Walter spent the sleepless hours pondering over his future.

To find himself suddenly cast adrift was desperately hard just when he most needed money with which to make Mabel happy.

Yet he was young and strong, full of throbbing life and burning activity. The up-hill road might surely be climbed with perseverance and persistency, by one ready and willing to work and prove himself worthy of a good woman's love.

Of course, he must leave his regiment, renounce the luxuries of wealth, and fight the battle unaided against poverty.

So sure did he feel of success, that the sting of loss, and his sorrow for Jules Hirschler's injustice faded to insignificance.

His eyes were heavy, however, from a restless night; he looked pale and haggard when the warm morning sunlight crept through his window in his club bedroom.

"It will never do to look like this," he thought, glancing at his drawn features in the glass. "If you are down in your luck, it is no good publishing it to the whole world."

So he sent round to the stables to order the new charger he had just bought from Captain Lingard of the 16th.

"It's a perfect living demon," he had told him frankly, at which Walter smiled, and handed him his 200 guineas without question. You must pay for blood, and Lingard's horse had been the talk of the regiment.

"A gallop in the Row will be just the thing to freshen me up," said Walter to himself, not forgetting the unpleasant work that lay before him.

He looked admiringly at his latest purchase as it stood outside the club door stamping its feet and tossing its head. The black coat shone like satin, and Walter wondered, as he sprang into the saddle, whether this would be the last time he should ride it before Lingard's "Demon" passed from its new owner's hands into others.

Sad at heart he entered the gates at Hyde Park Corner, with the long stretch of tan before him already peopled by riders and their steeds. Many eyes were turned enviously in the direction of "Demon," who, true to his name, gave Walter more trouble than he would have cared to own.

Beads of perspiration stood out on his brow, for "Demon" was full of corn and high spirits, and nearly wrenched his rider's arms from their sockets, when he reined him in from a gallop. As he sped up the incline, great lumps of earth flew high into the air from the animal's hoofs; more than once he bolted, and his devilry seemed inexhaustible.

Perhaps Walter was weakened from mental care, for the horse played with him like a child, finally succeeding in unseating his rider, and kicking him in the leg, just above the old wound, which had been paining him that morning.

He was carried to St. George's Hospital, where the doctors appeared somewhat puzzled by the sudden inflammation which had set in.

"What sort of an injury was the old one?" they asked him.

Walter could afford them no sort of information.

"I'm afraid we shall give you some pain," said one. "The wound must be probed and opened to discover the cause of irritation."

Walter agreed.

"Be as quick as you can," he said, clenching his teeth.

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He was conscious of a sickening agony, and burying his head in a pillow, tore the cover with his teeth.

Gradually he began to feel easier, and finding they were binding up the wound with wondering faces, asked them the cause of their evident amazement.

"It is most extraordinary," said a voice at his elbow. "A large stone was extracted—looks like some uncut jewel."

Walter held out his trembling fingers to grasp the prize.

They gave it to him, stained with his own blood.

"*The lost diamond!*" he cried. "Joe's hidden spoil."

* * * *

Jules Hirschler was sitting alone in his study.

Oh! if only Walter would return, and by some word, some sign, give him a loophole to relent.

He was too reserved to make the first advance, yet he pined for the lad he had grown to love, with all a father's yearning.

As if in answer to his thoughts a message came that Walter had returned, and asked to see him.

The old man's heart leapt with joy.

"Bring him here," he replied, scarcely able to conceal his relief before the servant.

Walter had come back penitent, he should have his blessing!

The door opened, and his all but son limped in.

Mr. Hirschler did not speak, but gazed with ineffable tenderness upon Walter.

What would he say?

The supplication for forgiveness that Jules had expected came not. Only a deferential bow, and the ordinary tones of a courteous visitor.

"I have come on a matter of business," he said.

"Oh!" replied Hirschler, as if a sudden douche of cold water had been flung over him. "Won't you sit down?"

"God bless you, my boy."

"Thanks. It is rather painful standing, I have had an accident to my leg."

Jules looked concerned, but checked the anxious words that rose involuntarily to his lips.

"What have you to say?"

"You remember the diamond that Joe stole and concealed?"

The question came like an electric shock to Hirschler.

"The diamond—yes—could I ever forget?"

"It is found," replied Walter slowly.

The old man leapt to his feet with a half-smothered scream.

"*Found!*"

He trembled so violently that for the moment Walter feared he would fall down in a fit.

"Yes, I am glad to say that I have the privilege of returning it to you, as a slight token of the gratitude I feel for all your past goodness to me."

The young man's voice shook slightly. As he spoke he held out his arm, spread open his fingers, and revealed the chief among Hirschler's gods, lying in his palm.

The old man grasped it with a yell of triumph, and falling on his knees, beside himself with joy, grasped Walter's hands, showering kisses upon them.

"God bless you, my boy," he exclaimed excitedly, "how did you find it, when and where?"

He briefly explained, the colour rushing back to his face, while the old familiarity revived between them.

"And all these years you have carried that treasure about in your flesh," said Jules Hirschler. "My poor boy! what a burden it has been for you. No, no, my lad, not *my* diamond," as he pushed his god towards Walter. "That shall be my wedding present to you and Mabel Forest."

W. G.

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Melody! Melody!! Melody!!!

SIXPENCE MONTHLY.

- - THE NEW MUSICAL MAGAZINE. - -

THE FIRST NUMBER WILL BE PUBLISHED ON

February 29th for March 1st,

AND AMONGST ITS CONTENTS WILL APPEAR:

A NEW SONG.
By Ch. Gounod (posthumous work).

BERCEUSE DE JOCELYN.
For Violin and Piano. By Benjamin Godard.

NEW PATRIOTIC SONG.
By J. M. Coward. Words by Clement Scott.

MEDITATION FOR ORGAN OR HARMONIUM.
By Professor Bridge.

NEW WALTZ, "SPIRIT OF THE STARS."
By May Ostlere.

AND COMPOSITIONS FROM TITO MATTEI. C. H. CLUTSAM. A. GORING THOMAS. A. C. CROWE, (COMPOSER OF SEE-SAW WALTZ.) A. J. CALDICOTT. LAWRENCE KELLIE, GABRIEL FAURE. ETC., ETC.

A literary interest is given to the Magazine by contributions on "Musical Happenings," by Mr. R. S. Hichens, and by some valuable criticisms of current and recent musical works by Mr. Joseph Bennett.

From the above list of contributors it will be seen that the very best talent only is represented, and the aim of the promoters of MELODY will be to provide for Sixpence a selection of vocal and instrumental music such as could never before have been purchased even for One Hundred Sixpences.

MELODY will consist of 56 pages, sheet music size, and will be inclosed in a stout cover, bearing on its front page a design of most striking beauty.

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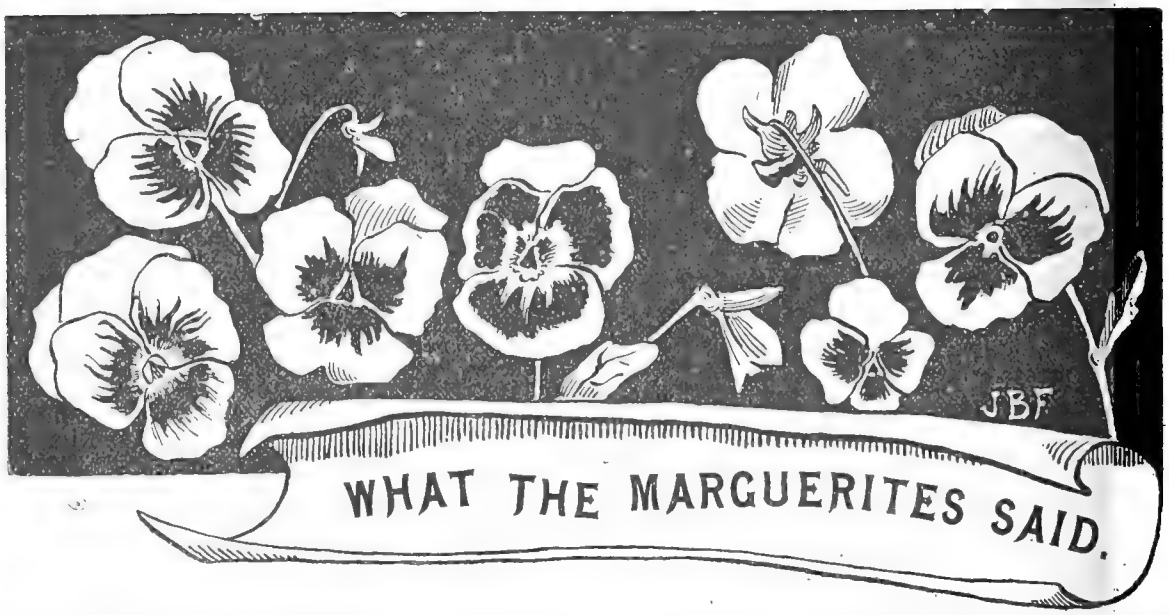

WHAT THE MARGUERITES SAID.

Charavelle is a pretty village which I particularly admire, and so would you if you knew its little church, a chiselled jewel, its old château with its walls cracked and mossy, but above all the location of the village, which clings to the side of the mountain like a nest fallen from I know not where.

In this corner of the world, not mentioned in the geographies, lived some years ago an old woodcutter and a rich farmer. Everybody in the country knew old Pierre and his miserable hut in the edge of the wood, and when they met him with a load of faggots on his back, or with his axe raised against the trunk of a tree, they all gave him a friendly "good-day." He was a good man who had never harmed even a fly, so everyone said, and having passed the better part of his life in the solitude of the forests, preserved, in spite of his great age, a pure and honest heart.

Everyone also knew the rich farmer, Michael Merieux, but no one liked him. He was avaricious and sullen, and, moreover, superstitious, like those who are not sure of their reckoning. He loved money passionately, and every means of increasing his wealth appeared to him to be legitimate and proper. It is useless to say that he did not spend it freely. No one ever saw him at the wine shop. He never gave a sou to the beggar who held out his hand on Sunday as they came out from mass, and his door was never opened, or his heart either, to the wayfarer in quest of a bit of bread or a cup of wine.

And yet he was the richest farmer near Charavelle, having vines, fields of wheat and meadows yielding rich forage, which he always sold at the highest price. He was old, without children or family that anyone knew of, and it was a mystery to everybody what he would do with the fortune which he increased day by day.

A strange idea one morning entered the head of the old woodcutter to go and borrow some money from the rich farmer. It was true that long ago Merieux had said to Pierre, after a service he had rendered him: "When you have need of me do not hesitate. One good turn deserves another." Well, now he had need of his help, and notwithstanding the sordid avarice of the old farmer, the woodcutter, with the artless trust that characterised him, went to Merieux and said:

"You can relieve me of a great trouble. My boy writes me that he is ill and in need of a little money. I haven't it now, but in October, when I have finished cutting down the side of the wood which they have marked for the new road I shall be able to pay you, if you will lend it to me to-day."

"I have no money to lend," said the farmer. "Times are as hard for me as well as for anybody else."

The woodcutter shrugged his shoulders.

"Say, rather, that you will not lend it," said he, "for you have plenty. You could save me a great deal of trouble."

"I repeat to you—I cannot!" said Merieux gruffly.

"Then I must remind you of what you said to me one day: 'One good turn deserves another; when you have need of me do not hesitate.'"

"Bah, that is too long ago," said the farmer. "What are you talking about?"

"Yes," said the woodcutter, "it was a long time ago, but, all the same, I risked my life to save yours, when I carried you out of Jacques' house which was burning while you slept. I do not say this to reproach you. I have never spoken of it to anyone. I would not speak of it now if it were not to remind you of your promise, for you see my son's sick, and he relies upon me to help him. It will be a great service to me." And he added in a low tone, as if ashamed to be persistent: "You will save his life perhaps, and I risked mine to save yours."

"Life, life," growled old Merieux. "When I lend, it is my money. I do not risk it or my life."

And old Pierre went away without the money that he came to borrow. Another, however, had pity on the old man, who, for the first time in his life felt bitterly towards a human being.

He sought a means of avenging himself on Merieux without doing him serious harm. At last, after mature reflection, one night as the moon shone as bright as daylight, he went out towards the wheatfields of the rich farmer. It was in March; the grass was just

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beginning to sprout, and at the top of the trees were a few shivering buds to show that Nature was ready to come forth radiant and charming at the first call of spring.

The woodcutter went to the middle of the field, and there, in the midst of the wheat which would soon be up, he traced with a stick some light furrows of strange and irregular forms, then throwing something into the furrows he covered them with earth and quietly returned to his hut. The following night he did the same thing in another field of wheat, and for several nights following that until he had been in all of Merieux's fields.

And in the morning, being very sure that he had not been seen by anything but the stars, nor heard by anything but the crickets, he would go to his work in the woods where the little nestlings were just beginning to chatter.

* * * *

Time passed, and the warm season made the wheat and the flowers grow. One morning a great caravan of people came from Charavelle and the surrounding villages to see a strange phenomenon in the fields of Farmer Merieux, who had been ill for some time and knew nothing about it.

What was his surprise, his terror, to see when he went out for the first time, the word "Miser" traced in gigantic letters of flowers in the midst of his wheat. Yes, marguerites, whose beautiful blossoms speak so sweetly to lovers, rose up on their stems in thick clusters accusing the old skinflint. "Miser," again the blue cornflowers in other field; "Miser," repeated the crimson poppies in another, and the people he met called to him "Miser! Miser!"

All night long he seemed to see before his eyes and to hear buzzing in his ears that terrible word. What did it mean? How did this accusation, at first whispered by those who knew him, spring forth so openly in his fields? Was it because he had always refused to give a straw to the poor of the country?

The old woodcutter.

As he was very superstitious and not very strong in his head it came near driving him crazy.

"You cannot defend yourself now," said the old woodcutter, who came to see him one day, "for even the flowers, whose souls are so tender and pitiful, have accused you in the sight of heaven! Truly, you must be a great culprit!"

"I—I—am not—a miser."

"You are the only one who thinks so. After all that has been shown you, if some misfortune happens to you after this warning——"

"Some misfortune?" said Merieux. "Do you think——"

"Listen," said the woodcutter. "There has been, you know it well, a kind of evil spirit in the country; no one has seen it, but it exists all the same. Now, to conjure it away, I know what I would do."

"What would you do?"

"This—and not take four roads about it—this year I would give all the money from the wheat to the poor-box of the country."

"Never, never! You must find some other way."

"There is no other way," said Pierre; "the letters sprang up at the same time as the wheat—that was meant to direct you."

"How do you know?" asked the farmer.

"That comes of itself. Reflect! Why did the flowers write that name in your fields?"

In a word, so well did the woodcutter work on his fears that the first time in his life old Merieux made a large donation to the poor.

Everybody commented upon this strange occurrence, but only the woodcutter knew how it came about—that he, in the clear nights of March had sown in the fields of the old farmer some seeds of marguerites, cornflowers, and poppies, without being seen by anyone but the stars overhead, and heard by none but the crickets.

Ethel Dicey.

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The Knotted Rope.

It is night—black, tempestuous, oppressive, abnormal. The thick, gloomy clouds have gathered all day long over the fair valley, green and smiling, and their dark shadow has so steeped in darkness the landscape that its vivid sub-tropical hues have seemed painted over with a wash of deeper colour, dashed wide and thick by vandal hands. Later on, they have massed together heavily and of their own weight have sunken low, with a downfall of rain in torrents.

With this the wind has risen—that cold tremendous wind that blows straight down from the volcanoes; a wind so sharp, so keen, so entirely beyond the resistance of man's endurance, that the clear-eyed Aztecs, quick, like their descendants, to catch the salient characteristics of any matter, were wont in their picture writing to represent its deadly force by the significant symbol of a human skeleton, pierced through the chest by an arrow.

All day long the light rustling blades of the cane fields lay inert and silent under the weight of the oppressive atmosphere; but now, caught in the impalpable finger of this *ven tarron*, they are shaken and twisted, rattling until their sound is like the clashing sabres of a mighty army in battle. Other noises, too, come through the darkness, untraversed by a gleam of tropic lightning, that makes itself felt as tangibly as a pall.

That dense, thick blackness presses against the little panes of the windows with so ominously aggressive an effect that we close the little wickets, trembling with a very genuine terror. Every now and again some high, shrill sound, like the shriek of a dying man, penetrates to where we sit cowering together. Is it the cry of birds, driven by the storm from their nests in the nooks of this old hacienda monastery? Is it the frightened howl of the bloodhounds, confined in a vacant room off the corridor near us? Or must we seek farther than material earthly sources for the origin of those blood-curdling cadences?

Of a sudden we start to our feet with cries of terror as a loud knocking sounds hard and fast on the panels of the double door between us and the corridor. It comes again with the sound of human voices; this visitation is nothing unearthly. Still reluctantly enough we open, and the light shines out on the wrinkled brown face of old Romualdo, the patriarch of the hacienda, leaning on the arm of the major-domo. José Cortina looks careworn and haggard—troubled, even frightened.

"Señor Alvarez is dying," he says, with lips that are purple; "will it please you to participate in the last scene?"

"*Pues, si, senores*," old Romualdo croaks, as the other ceases, "we have brought candles for you, and the holy man is waiting."

We look at each other perplexed! the proposition seems uncanny. But our companion, who knows the country, interposes.

"It is customary," he says, "in event of a death, to invite all beneath the roof to assist at the *sacramentos*. We must go. To refuse would be to manifest ill-will towards the dying and indifference to the repose of his soul."

A gust of wind swoops in at the door, and blows out the candle. We grope our way to the corridor, and battle along it to the chamber of the dying man. At last we arrive, breathless, at the little ante-room, a servant hands us lighted candles, and we steal into the bed-chamber where the centenarian is dying.

He has been a powerful man, this Don Cipriano Alvarez, and even now he looks no feebler, no older, than many a man of half his years. Around his bed are gathered the entire household, less those who now come in with us, and they and we take our places, kneeling, bearing the lighted candles.

"Do ye believe"—the priest looks round upon us as if convinced of our heresy—"in the Blessed Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?"

And "We do believe," we answer. And so on through *Credo*, and to the administration of the Communion.

Then the priest bends above the sick man with the holy wafer. Don Cipriano Alvarez suddenly sits up in his bed, and pushes away the hand of the minister.

"Away with your bread and your wine!" he orders, and his voice is deep and resonant; "you have shrived me as one in the grasp of death and beyond confession, and therein have I fooled you. I held my peace, for that I did not wish to answer. I heed not your prate of repentance nor of absolution. Why should I? The same motives that prompted me then are strong within me, and will burn in my heart past the doors of the Inferno or of Heaven. See here! When new times and new surroundings freed me from the execution of that old-time decree, ye thought I had lost all feeling in the lethargy of old age. Now what is this, I pray thee?" He throws open the breast of his bedgown, and we can see, trailing across his dark, hairy bosom, that is still full and massive, a rope that is knotted about his neck, inside the collar.

A cry bursts forth from all of the retainers. "The halter! Ah! He is still wearing the halter!" And old Romualdo, with the tears in his dulled eyes, mutters: "It was for this, then, that he would no longer have my service."

"Hark ye!" cried Don Cipriano, "listen! Do ye hear the voice of Andronica, and the hoof-beats of the steed on Cubilete? Open the window, that I may hear it clearer! Open, I bid ye! Open!"

He is leaning forward towards the window, his swarthy face alight, impassioned. But the servants huddle together, frightened either at his gruesome manner or at his impiety, and no one moves to obey him. Then he makes as if he would throw himself from the bed and hasten to the window, but old Romualdo catches and holds him feebly, and cries to us: "I beg ye, masters, open, lest he go mad before us!" The window is thrown open. At the same moment, the tempest seems to lull from its vehemence, and borne on we know not what stratum of silence comes from afar, as if echoing down the steep sides of Cubilete, the thunder of a horse dashing along the rocky road, and mingling therewith, ringing shrieks of a woman.

The centenarian raises himself again and looks about him with an air of triumph, as if the sound were sweet as music to him.

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"Ye hear? After all the years 'tis still the same. I do not free her. I am master." As he speaks the words he lifts his hands to the rope about his neck as if it burnt him, gasps, shudders, and falls back on his pillow lifeless, as the priest makes the sign of the cross above him.

We watch by the corpse the rest of the night, for the people of the hacienda are so much shocked and terrified by the closing scene in this dark life that they will not even hold the usual *duelo*. And from the priest and old Romualdo, crouched on the floor beside the bed of his master, we hear the dead man's story.

* * * * *

Cipriano Sota Alvarez was a Spaniard, a Castilian, reared and educated in England, for the better acquisition of thorough business habits, that he might manage and dispatch the affairs of the sugar plantations of Amatla. In those days—it was a decade before the achievement of Mexico's independence of the Spanish yoke, or rather it was the year before the patriot priest, Hidalgo, incited his countrymen to attempt that independence—in those days Amatla was a monastery of Carmelites, and the revenues of the hacienda were enormous. Friar Blas Alvarez, uncle of Cipriano, was at the head of this brotherhood, and he, growing aged, was more than relieved to turn over the questions of sales and accounts to the young man.

Young Alvarez was a man of passions as deep and intense as they were fiery, and the extent of his power at the monastery hacienda did not tend to teach him self-denial. Of all exterior matters he was virtually master. True, he dwelt within the monastery walls, and its discipline was rigorous. But his days were spent abroad, riding from one section to another of the broad domain, and if his comings and goings were irregular, he was allowed licence on the score of zeal in the worldly benefits of the community.

It was in one of his wild rides about the country, on the business of the plantation, that he first saw Andronica Valles. Far up the mountain Cubilete, which was an outpost of the greater of the volcanoes, as it were, a stepping-stone to its vastness—far up, so far that it lay already among the pine trees, there nestled in a clayey hollow a little hamlet, called, from the character of the soil there, El Barral, the place of clay, the clay-bank.

Here dwelt a handful of simple people who moulded and baked the great earthen *hormas* or shapes in which the arroba-weight cones of sugar were charged at the plantations. It was not a profitable calling, for the vessels sold for the merest pittance; but it was a steady one, for the demand was always active. So the simple villagers turned and baked the earthen vessels, and carried them down the steep mountain road into the smiling valley, to Amatla and the other plantations.

Andronica Valles dwelt at El Barral; she was the daughter of a *horméro*, and the day that Cipriano Alvarez saw her first she was descending the steep and rocky roadway, with half a score of the moulds loaded upon her shoulders. She stepped painfully aside to let the horseman pass by her, nor raised her glance to see him. But Cipriano Alvarez was struck by some suggestion of youthful litheness in the slight figure bent under its burden, all shrouded as it was in the disguising coarse blue woollen skirt and *huipil*, and he reined in beside her with some imperative challenge as to her name, her abiding place, and the destination of her *hormas*.

"I am called Andronica Valles, most humble of your servants," she said, after the accepted formula, and as to the lord of the manor. "I am daughter to Toribio Valles. We dwell at El Barral up yonder, and I am carrying the *hormas* to Santa Lucia."

Dark with the rich, soft brownness of her people, with the warm blood mantling in waves under her skin of velvet, her beauty was luscious and tempting as the sunlit downiness of a peach in a southern orchard. Here was no haughty type of an oppressed or captive Indian princess, but the soft, timid, gentle air of womanhood that has been a temptation and a stimulant to hot-blooded man since ever the world was.

"Thou wilt not take the *hormas* to Santa Lucia," said Cipriano Alvarez; "but rather to Amatla—these and all thou shalt have in the future. And thou wilt tell my steward to give thee another *peseta* on the dozen, by my orders."

He put spurs to his black horse, Satanas, and rode away down the mountain side, as if he were already ashamed or repented of the interest he had shown in a peon girl. Andronica laboured onward. Heavy as were the burdens laid upon her, they had not yet deadened the supple grace of her young limbs, any more than labour and privation had affected the seducing sweetness of her countenance, that might later become the leathery, unhuman mask that comes with even middle age to most women of her race and order.

When she went up the steep, cobble-stone incline, and in through the great vaulted gateway to the *despachoin*, a dim, dusk, high-arched corridor, it was with steps that flagged and wavered, not so much from fatigue as from misgiving. She had come seldom to Amatla with her *hormas*. There had been some altercation between her father and the steward—a question of a few coppers that the poor Indian claimed had not been paid for his wares, while the other raged at the imputation, and had thrown Toribio Valles thence with violence. The Indian, all meek and humble as he was, had gone no more to Amatla, and Andronica also had passed by to the farther hacienda of Santa Lucia, save on the rare occasion when there was no consumption yonder, or when her overtasked physical forces failed her.

But to-day the steward looked upon her with smiles of honey, praised the excellence of the wares she brought him, and gave her the additional *peseta* of which Cipriano Alvarez had spoken. But Andronica was ill at ease. She could but perceive that all this attention and solicitude was something abnormal, and she was acutely conscious of the presence of the young man, swarthy and dark bearded, sitting behind the tall desk by the window, who heard intently, she was sure, all that passed between her and the steward.

She turned the coins irresolutely in her hand when she received her money. "I do not know," she stammered, "this other money—it is too much—my father will be angry."

Cipriano looked up, and the steward scanned her curiously. Spaniards both, accustomed to the easy acceptation of pauperism in the whole world, they could not understand how one of her humble position could hesitate to receive a gift of money, from whatever source it should come. At a look from his master, the steward spoke to her with words of reassurance, insinuating, of kindly import. But Andronica shook her head, and laid the money upon the desk before her.

"My father would be angry—and—and I fear that Marcos would reprove me."

A flash of distrust and jealousy leapt into the

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deepest black eyes of Cipriano Alvarez. He glanced at the steward.

"And who may be this Marcos?" said that worthy, with condescension.

"Marcos—he is my *novio*," said the girl, a deep blush burning over her face; and drawing her *huipil* about her, she leapt down the incline, and sped out upon the road like some wild creature, scarce pausing even for reverence before a little squad of the monks that was entering.

The steward looked at Alvarez with a grin of malice. "For *peona*, she is ungrateful. Better give it up, *mi amo*."

Cipriano muttered something into his black beard: "I will give it up—never. So long as she lives—nay, so long as I live, for I am likely to survive her—will I keep before me the thought of vengeance on the jade who has mocked me with her Marcos!"

From that day on, Alvarez seemed to have but one object in life—the pursuit of Andronica Valles.

Thus it befel that he rode up to El Barral, one sunny morning, meaning to settle the matter at once and for ever to his satisfaction.

Cipriano Alvarez flung his horse's bridle to the *mozo* riding behind him, and entered the poor *jacál* of Toribio Valles.

"I have come here for your daughter," he said, without any preface.

The *hormero* left the lathe upon which he had been working, and stood up before the other. Notwithstanding his Spanish name, he was, if not of pure Indian blood, of a strain almost unmixed, and generations of servitude and degradation had not yet defaced the noble type of his ancestry.

"For twice a hundred years," he said, with impressive slowness, "we have been slaves to the Spaniards, and we have, too, many of us, learned to kiss the hands that smite us, to wade in the filth of our masters, to imitate their vices, and to pander to them, to worship their false gods, even. Some few there are among us who keep to the old traditions. We live simply, miserably, toiling like beasts, that we may live, but we live purely. Every day we watch the light kindle yonder on the great white brow of Popocatepetl, the Smoking Mountain, and hope whispers sweetly to us that that day's dawn may herald the coming of Quetzacoatl, the Fair God. And his own coming, this time, not that of false pretenders, worshippers of gold and silver. But, for that our eyes may behold him clearly, for that our feet may follow to the kingdom whither he will lead us, we must have led sober lives, and clean, and honest. Some among us have lost hope and fallen, as I tell you. But some among us still are steadfast and enduring. Such of us do not sell ourselves, nor do we sell our children."

He swung aside the rush mat that served as door between the two poor rooms of his dwelling.

"Andronica, come hither."

The girl came into the room; she was shivering with shame and anger, and Alvarez could but see that, however exaggerated might be the beliefs of the father, the daughter shared them fully. None knew better than he how doggedly the Indians cling to their ancient faith, and how persistently they practise their old rites, shrewdly cloaking the truth, for the most part, with a very fervour of apparent zeal and blind devotion to the faith of the conquerors.

"Will your worship speak to the girl?" said Toribio Valles; "she is free as the humming birds down in the valley, free as the silk of the ceiba when the pods burst open. If she will, she may go with your worship to the life of ease and dishonour that you offer."

Cipriano Alvarez turned silently, sullenly, to Andronica. For the life of him, he could not have spoken to her of the end to which he had destined her, braving, as he must, the indignant flashing light of those great eyes, erstwhile so tender and timid, and the fine scorn that curved her gentle young lips.

She threw back her head, so little while ago under ignominious burdens, like a stag that snuffs a taint on the sweet air of morning.

"There is no longer the hope of tending the fire on the teocallis," she said, "and so the life I would best love is hopeless to me. But Quetzacoatl comes—or soon, or late—and his kingdom will lack people, for our nation is degenerate and unworthy to enter in it. What then can I do better than to rear for him brave sons and honest daughters, that his new realm shall be populous. But shall you be their father? *You!*"—there was unmeasured disdain in her voice, as she looked at Alvarez—"No! never! me likes not the sort of man who covers his mouth with beard, to conceal the weakness of it. Now there is one over the Guerrero way—he is like me—of the *Yndios*."

But her father, more wise than she in reading the hearts and the passions of men, laid his hand upon her lips. "Thou art a foolish babbler. Thou hast dreamed an ideal lover, in the semblance of Quetzacoatl. Señor, you have your answer. Leave us now, I pray you." For the gathering rage in the face of the Spaniard was a thing to see and tremble at.

For all answer, Alvarez raised his hand, that dark and strong right hand that had ere now thrown by the horns a charging bull in the meadows, and—oh! eternal shame to him!—with one blow on the temple struck down the Indian, old and feeble. Stock still, where she stood, Andronica looked at him for an instant, as if with horror and incredulity of his impious cruelty. Then she sprang straight at the throat of Alvarez, rounding her hands before her lips as she came, to utter a strange, wild call that echoed weirdly through the pine trees. In an instant, her fingers were clasping the Spaniard's throat like little hands of steel; her hot wide eyes flamed upon him.

Ashamed though he was to struggle with a woman, as he had not been ashamed to strike down a weak and infirm old man, he yet found himself in self-defence, compelled to strive with the hands that were choking him relentlessly. But the carrier of burdens had the power of her training and her free forest life, and it might not have proved so easy a matter for the Spaniard to free himself had his man not come to the rescue and helped to force Andronica aside. And when she would have returned to the attack she swayed slightly with the impetus of the thrust the man had given her, and her feet touched her prostrate father. All the tigress in her died out in an instant. Her face trembled into anguish and she fell on her knees beside the injured Indian as the two intruders leapt into their saddles. It was time they were away, for the hut was beginning to fill with stealthy-footed shapes that had hastened together there at the call of Andronica.

That night Toribio Valles lay in his *jacál* dying. The blow Alvarez had given him and the general shock to his frail, ill-nourished body had been more than his strength could bear, and his life was a question of days only. His people were about him, for this had been a man of distinction among them. His natural ability, his strength of character and singleness of purpose, together

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with his knowledge of the Spanish tongue, among those who knew only their native dialect, had made him a natural leader.

He waved them all aside, now, with one word, "Andronica." His daughter rose from her knees, and came to stand beside the reed mat he lay upon.

"Thou must leave me, my own, my dearest," he said, in the soft tongue of his people, "this is no place for thee. Thou must go—at once, to-night, over yonder to the mountains of Guerrero, where, near the great caverns of Cacalmanilpa, lives an aunt of thy dead mother. Prepare thyself, my little one, for the journey."

"Nay, father mine," said Andronica, "I cannot leave thee. I will wait until thou goest also."

"It will be many days ere I shall be able to go with thee," said Toribio Valles, disguising his mortal strait from the child of his heart, "and thou must not delay—that were fatal. Nay, no protest. Dost thou forget the laws of our gods of obedience to parents? Then do not vex me with objections."

Andronica ceased to demur, and shortly knelt before her father once again for his blessing ere her departure. More than one of their people made ready to accompany her, but she refused their offers.

"It is better that I go alone," she said, "for thus I may more readily escape the danger that threatens. They will not dream I go alone—for are not women timid? It is here that they will seek. Does a daughter desert the sick bed of her father?" she said almost bitterly.

"Have done, my child, with vain complaints and repinings," said Toribio Valles. "The gods speed thee upon thy journey and see thou pause not until thou reach Cuernavaca, for it is thus the interlopers mouth the name our people gave the city of Quauhahuac, for that it is near the beautiful hills. Go there to the *arbolario*, and the herbalist will send thee on to the caverns. It may be the gods have called thee thither, for that is the land of the young lad Donato."

So, with her father's knowledge of human nature lovingly brought into play to soften the pangs of parting, Andronica set forth on her journey. She must descend at least part way to the valley to skirt along the base of the mountains, and so she took her way down the steep, shelving sides of the Cubilete that she had traversed so often with her burdens. She was but a short space from her house when her quick ear caught the sound of horses' hoofs ascending, and a moment later, from around a sharp bend in the road, there flashed upon her the unexpected light of a lantern held in the hand of a mounted *mózo*, who threw its light on the path before Cipriano Alvarez.

With a bound like the leap of a deer she sprang upon a rock by the roadside; but too late—the men had seen her, and Alvarez, snarling like a wild beast, spurred Satanas forward.

"Where are you going, ingrate? What have you done that you steal away like a thief in the night?"

"I have done no wrong," she answered, "save that of belonging to a race despised and down-trodden—the race you and others regard only as chattels, to be beaten or played with as suits your superb convenience. And I am going—ah! where you dare not follow! I am going to the strongholds of my people, to the mountains of Guerrero, where burrow the great caverns, and where dwells the youth Donato. Ay! but he is noble; *mi Yndito! he* is a man! He is one a woman might die—or *live*—for."

She was wild with the spirit of wrong, she was elate with triumph in the sense of escape and change, and she was sixty feet away from and above Cipriano Alvarez. But from a silver ring among the trappings of his splendid saddle hung a coil whose line was twice that long—a cunningly-braided lasso of black and white horsehair; and while she spoke, Alvarez unbound the leather points that held it, and as she ceased, it hissed through the air and settled down over her head, her neck, and her shoulders, binding her arms to her waist, as bands of steel might have bound them. Then she was jerked roughly from her foothold, and pulled swiftly down to the roadway, and then—oh! sweet Heaven!—the black horse was spurred to madness, and went dashing down the steep sides of Cubilete, while a woman's shrieks rose on the night, loud and shrill at first, but all too soon becoming fainter and dying.

Meanwhile, farther up the mountain, near the hut where Toribio Valles lay dying, an owl hooted mournfully from the pine-trees, and the Indian opened his heavy eyes, and murmured to the watchers the refrain that amounts to a prophecy among his people: "*Canta el tecolote, el Yndio mucrd.** The Gods be with my daughter." Then the attenuated frame gave one great convulsive shudder, the stern patient face grew rigid, and father and child went together.

* * * * *

Friar Blas Alvarez wielded great influence in that part of the country, and the life of an Indian more or less was nothing as compared with a scandal in a monastery, yet even so the nephew of Friar Blas was tried for his monstrous crime and sentenced. But deference to the churchly influence modified the penalty, and Cipriano Alvarez was condemned to be hanged in his ninety-ninth year, wearing, meanwhile, about his neck a noosed rope, that all should recognise in him a condemned murderer.

Within the decade broke out the war of Mexican Independence, and the times were sorely troubled. Later, when the Laws of Reform were enacted, the church had to yield up her broad domains, and to Cipriano Alvarez came, by heritage, the great hacienda of Amatla, which had been held as individual estate by his uncle, Friar Blas. Other times bring other matters.

Under the new rule and order of things the old story was forgotten, its scene lying as it did in a remote and then, before the era of railways, somewhat inaccessible region. So that when the time came for the execution of his sentence, the crime and the sentence of Alvarez were buried in records long reduced to ashes in one or another of the country's epochs of warfare, and its memory was buried in the hearts of a few of his oldest retainers, who were unlikely to recall it, and Cipriano Alvarez died in his bed, at the ripe old age of a hundred years.

* * * * *

"But it seems but yesterday it happened," mutters old Romualdo; "and to think he has worn the rope that he might still remember! He must have loved the *Yndito* truly, if fiercely. And he has never loved a woman since then. Oh! the dull blows of her soft body on the rocks! and the thunder of the horse's hoofs down Cubilete! and the wild, wild screams of Andronica, as he dragged her onward! Just as to-night you heard them—I, who know, I tell you! *Si, señores!* for I was servant then to Don Cipriano. God rest his soul!"

Y. H. Addis.

* "When hoots the owl, the Indian dies."

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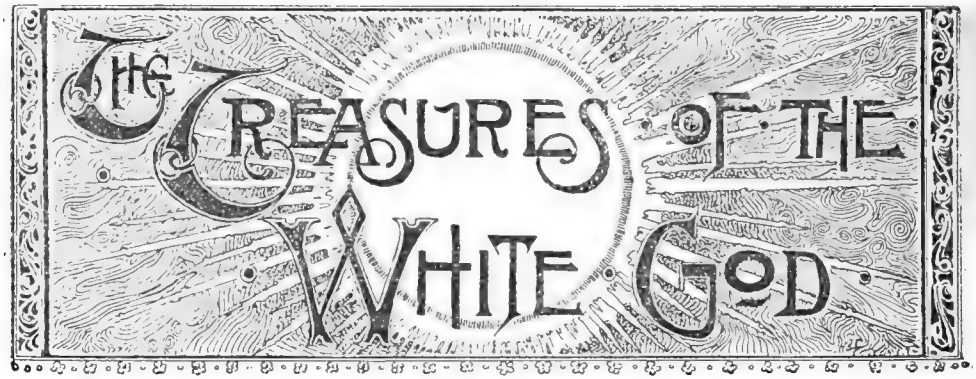

The Story of a Shameful Crime.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The Aztec Treasure.

With eyes of devout affection, esteem and pity, Adrian Burgoyne devoured the counterfeit of the fair young girl he loved.

The possession of that picture marked the climax of as strange and dramatic a coalition of emissary of the law and adjudged criminal as ever yet was ratified.

Upon that fateful evening when Mr. Detective Dean intruded upon the solitude of Burgoyne, it was to prove that his earnest protestations of friendship and devotion were sincere.

He narrated his pitiful story as might a culprit of the *via dolorosa* to a father confessor. From first to last he depicted his half-hearted honesty as a detective officer, his acceptance of a bribe, his shame, his remorse, his contrition, and its atonement.

"I live but for one object—to clear the tarnish of bribe-taking from my record," he told Burgoyne earnestly. "I know you are an innocent man. Richard Sheldon and Colonel Lytle stand, self-accused, as perjurers and conspirators, in their overheard conversation, only I must secure positive proofs ere we menace them openly, ere you reveal your true identity."

So these two clasped hands over the yawning abyss of obscurity and fear, and the swift, clever proceedings of the veteran officer soon began to cast a cheering radiance over its dark depths.

The murder of Lytle shocked Dean, but it did not turn him from his close shadow of Sheldon. The latter was "up to some new scheme," and he guessed its import—flight. It was he who warned the bank, it was he who had placed a score of obstacles in Sheldon's course of flight.

"He aims to secure a large sum of money, and depart," he stated to Burgoyne. "We can only delay him—we dare not arrest him yet. Lytle's death complicates affairs, for he might have been frightened, cajoled or bribed into betraying his accomplice. As it is, I am daily weaving a close net of circumstantial proof about the unwary Sheldon."

"But the girl! Patrice!" was the burden of Burgoyne's constant, fervid cry. "Find her. She may be in poverty, in peril. Her safety must be precedent to every other consideration."

"Yes, to find her—to have her evidence concerning her years of tacit imprisonment, would form a strong claim against Sheldon. She is probably in hiding somewhere—in terror of these villains, perhaps in disguise, working at starvation wages to keep herself alive. An advertisement in the papers would be construed by her to emanate from these plotters. She may hopelessly consider you dead. Ah! I have it!"

And the result of a further consultation led to the culmination that the lurking Sheldon had just witnessed.

"I found Mrs. Loring at Lynde—the woman with whom Patrice Ringold lived for so many years," narrated Dean. "She happened to have that single photograph of the girl."

"And of what special value is it to us in a search for her?" queried Burgoyne curiously.

"You shall see to-morrow. I will then take that photograph and have a hundred copies of it made. I will send one to every police official in the city. From it they may identify the girl and recognise her if found. I know the skilful methods of the department—none better."

"Oh, you give me hope!" exclaimed Burgoyne fervently, with an affectionate glance at the picture of his lost love.

"Once we find her, I shall take her affidavit, yours and my own, and present them to a magistrate. This case of conspiracy, kidnapping and fraud against Richard Sheldon will be complete. I shall arrest him. The only fear I have is regarding the disproval of your guilt in the anarchist murder."

"Never mind me!" cried Burgoyne vehemently. "Find Patrice, punish the villain, Sheldon, and, once I restore to her the fortune I secured in Mexico, I am willing to go back to my lonely prison cell, proud, thankful that I have righted a great wrong!"

"The fortune—Mexico!" The listening Richard Sheldon started wildly, and his sordid heart gave a great leap of avaricious joy.

"By the way, Burgoyne," spoke the detective again, "that is a point you did not fully explain to me. You rescued the treasure contained in the White God, then?"

"Yes, anticipating Lytle, sealing up the idol afresh, escaping from the cave and bringing it north in safety."

"And it is really valuable?"

"It consists of precious stones mainly. I have it hidden in a safe place—not here. I shall to-morrow, as a sure precaution against accident, put it in some safety deposit vault, subject to your order or mine."

"I would. Its loss would be a calamity, after all your trouble. Come, you dare venture a little stroll with me.

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We can continue our discussion of our plans in the outer air."

The two men left the room. Richard Sheldon drew back from his place of espionage, with a face one void of amazement, concern, cupidity.

He was menaced—direfully, fatally. The detective, Dean, was working day and night to convict him of crime.

But—he was warned! Ah! he would elude them. They should close the entangling net too late—the groping hands of justice should never claim him as a victim.

He was enlightened; the Ringold treasure was in the possession of Adrian Burgoyne.

With the morrow it would be unearthed from its secret hiding-place and transferred to a more secure spot.

"It shall never reach its destination; Patrice Ringold shall never be found by these men!" muttered the schemer determinedly.

He set to work briskly, as new and forcible ideas entered his mind. He resolved that for the next twenty-four hours Adrian Burgoyne should not leave his sight for the space of a single moment.

For an hour Sheldon worked with a slender piece of wire, reached through the transom, to secure the one clue to the identity of Patrice Ringold—the photograph. He pushed it to the floor, and then, though the lower crack of the door dragged it finally into reach. Then he lay down on the bed in the apartment, to watch, listen and await developments.

Adrain Burgoyne returned alone to his room. His first thought was of the photograph. It was gone. In consternation and alarm he searched for it, feared it had been blown through the window by the wind, and, after a persistent quest in the stone-paved court below, came to the conclusion that Dean must have taken it with him to secure copies.

At nine o'clock the next morning he left the hotel. A cautious form shadowed him—that of Richard Sheldon.

Burgoyne reached a rickety-looking house and entered it, and Sheldon awaited his return outside.

It was here that Burgoyne had stayed upon his first return from Mexico, and here, in the attic, he had secreted the treasure he had found in the Aztec idol.

When he came down to the street again he carried a bag in one hand.

He started briskly back towards the business portion of the city.

"It all works my way," chuckled his tireless shadower. "That is the Ringold treasure. He has unearthed it; he purposes taking it to some safety deposit vault, as he announced to Dean. Now, then, for a final, a decisive move!"

The merchant quickened his pace. Just as Adrian Burgoyne reached a street corner, and was about to turn into a new thoroughfare, there was a rapid step at his side.

He thrilled to sharp dread and excitement as a firm hand clutched his arm and an ominous voice sounded in his ear.

"One moment, Mr. Adrian Burgoyne," it spoke—"*I know you!*"

CHAPTER XXXII.

For Love or Gold!

"I know you!"

The words rang out prophetically and with direful menace upon the startled hearing of Adrian Burgoyne, so full were the tones in which they were uttered of triumph, resentment and ferocity.

A glance betrayed the speaker, despite his disguise. For a moment the two men looked into each other's soul, and Richard Sheldon never relaxed his grasp of Burgoyne's arm.

"Release me!" breathed the latter finally, trying to break loose from the clutch of his vindictive captor.

"No!" spoke Sheldon resolutely, "make no scene, no resistance, if you are wise!" he hissed. "Do you see that cab approaching us?"

He indicated a vehicle rapidly nearing them as he spoke.

"What if I do?" demanded Burgoyne, debating resistance, an assault, flight, in his mind.

"I shall hail its driver."

"What is that to me?"

"Liberty—life!" replied the other, with swift impressiveness. "I shall get into that cab; you will precede me."

"No!" spoke Burgoyne determinedly.

"And I say, yes!"

"Wait and see!"

"We shall. Hey, cabby!"

The driver turned to the curb and halted there.

"Engaged?"

"No, sir."

"Get in," spoke Sheldon, in a menacing undertone, to his companion.

"I have no desire to accompany you."

"It is not a matter of inclination, but necessary. I will wait ten seconds. If you do not step into that cab at the termination of that time, I shall act."

"How?" Burgoyne quivered restively.

"By calling the police, and delivering you over to justice as an escaped convict."

That meant disaster, the firing of a mine not yet prepared for an explosion. He hesitated.

"And if I go with you?" asked Burgoyne temporising.

"You will give me an hour of your time, listening to what I have to say. Then you shall be free to go where you will. I swear it!"

"*You* swear it!" fired up Burgoyne, hotly and contemptuously. "Your past dealings——"

"Never mind the past! Ten seconds! Is it yonder police officer, or the cab?"

With a perturbed face, Adrian Burgoyne stepped into the vehicle.

The merchant slammed the door, and mumbled a direction, his residence, to the driver.

"You said an hour, I believe?" spoke Burgoyne.

"I said an hour. You will not regret the interview."

Then perfect silence—glum suspicions on the part of the one, grim forboding with the other—prevailed, until ten minutes later, Adrian Burgoyne found himself face to face with Richard Sheldon, in his sumptuous library.

"I will come to the point briefly," spoke the merchant. "I thought you dead. It was a trick of Dean's. I know your plans. By acting first, and before your kind designs to convict me are ripe, I fortify my case. I can touch an electric button at my hand, and summon an officer of the law. I have a bargain to make with you."

"A bargain?" repeated Burgoyne suspiciously, never taking his hand from the bag he carried, nor his eyes from the furtive, watchful face of his host.

"Yes."

"Name it."

"I relinquish all prosecution or betrayal of your identity, for a certain consideration."

"What?"

"That handbag at your side and its contents!"

With a vivid start, Burgoyne rose to his feet.

"Never!" he cried, with resolute eyes. "It is not mine. It is a sacred trust. Arrest me if you will. The law will restore it to its rightful owner—not to you."

"We shall see!" hissed the baffled and malevolent schemer.

"I shall defend it with my life," avowed Burgoyne aggressively, placing his hand to his breast, and revealing the end of a weapon.

"Oh! I shall not try force," sneered the other lightly.

"You refuse?"

"Decidedly!"

"Then you are free to go."

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He pointed to the door as he spoke, Burgoyne hesitated. Was a trap awaiting him at its threshold? There was a latent, sinister menace in the manner of the merchant that he did not fancy.

"You will not arrest me?" he questioned.

"Not now."

Burgoyne backed to the door, still keeping close watch and word over the precious fortune in his possession.

"Only——"

He halted.

"Well?" he queried.

"You doom the woman you love!"

"Patrice!" cried Burgoyne, in a revelation of anguish. "Ah! wretched man! I understand you now!"

"I thought you would," gloated Sheldon. "Listen to me, Adrian Burgoyne. I am no vain plotter. You have the best of me, but not at this hour. The girl, Patrice!—I know where she is. In a single hour I can reach her—convey, compel her to accompany me to a foreign place, put her out of the way—*by accident!*"

His listener shuddered at the cold-blooded emphasis employed on those two last words.

"Speak, miscreant!" he gasped, in a frenzy of horror. "What do you want?"

"Patrice Ringold's fortune, in exchange for Patrice Ringold's liberty and life!"

"TAKE IT!"

In the strength of a mighty love, in the glamour and fidelity of a devotion that enwrapt soul and mind, all sordid considerations vanishing to nothingness. Adrian Burgoyne sprang to meet the price exacted.

"Take it!" he cried, in fevered suspense. "Her life, her safety, is all in all. Take the gold; it has brought nothing but wreck, blight, and ruin. Fill your false, craven heart with it, and sink to perdition! The girl, Patrice! Give her freedom—send me to her. Love will find a way to wreath her path with wealth!"

Fairly amazed, the plotter caught up the bag as it landed with a crash on the desk before him.

"Truth for truth, fairness for fairness," he spoke finally. "I will not deceive you. Read that."

He flung a letter to his visitor. The latter perused it eagerly.

It was from the matron of a reformatory in the city, and it acknowledged the receipt of one week's board in advance for his niece, Patrice.

"And that," continued Sheldon, scrawling a few lines and tossing the document to Burgoyne.

It was an order for the release of Patrice, "niece of Richard Sheldon," and was signed by the latter.

"Are you satisfied?"

"Yes."

"One other thing——"

"What is it?"

"I make no move against you, if you leave me to my fate."

Burgoyne was silent. He had found Patrice, but at what a cost!

He walked from the library, conning the directions on the order. Patrice—Patrice! What was gold, vengeance, to her bonny love?

Richard Sheldon hastened back to the library, once his visitor was gone.

In feverish haste, he tore open the hand-satchel.

Zounds! what royal tribute, what a glaring mass of riches!

Gold—a heap of it—pearls, diamonds, emeralds! He was an expert in the value of gems.

"A million!" he gloated. "Oh! surely that! Now for Europe—Amsterdam—a castle in Italy. Ah! I have won my prize at last!"

He crammed some clothes into a portmanteau. His mind was fixed on a plan of flight—by the rear door, to the nearest suburban railway station by a cab, the direct city trail broken, an east-bound train!

At the door, a man coming in confronted him. Sheldon uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"Davenant?" he muttered.

"Yes. I wanted to see you. A plausible story about your pretended niece being a wayward, troublesome girl, will hold her in safe hands until your further orders."

"Yes! yes!" interrupted Sheldon quickly. "Never mind that now. What do I owe you?"

"Two hundred, you promised."

"There is more." And Sheldon handed the astonished secret inquiry agent a large roll of notes.

"Thank you; but does this mean that I am dismissed?" queried Davenant, in a dissatisfied and injured tone.

"No, but I am going away."

"Oh! When you return, I may be of service to you. Oh! Mr. Sheldon!"

About to leave the house, Davenant halted.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Sheldon, irritated at the delay.

"The Golcondas?"

"The mining stock?"

"Yes."

"What about it?"

"You bade me make some inquiries."

"Yes; but don't trifle about it now. I am in a hurry."

"Trifle!" ejaculated Davenant "Why, sir! it's run up forty points."

"What!"

"Yes, sir. The shares took a turn on the stock exchange yesterday afternoon—new lode struck—big pay is in sight. It closed at 60. It started at 78 this morning. They predict par by noon."

Par? Golcondas at par! The excited Sheldon made a rapid mental calculation. He hesitated, and the man who hesitates in such a fateful situation as his own, is lost.

To sell meant ten thousand pounds, hard cash—small fortune in itself—ready money in abundance until he sold the jewels.

But he could not go to the stock exchange himself. No! He would trust to no man's honour. For all he knew, Adrian Burgoyne was preparing to accuse him, to stop his flight even now. If not, Mr. Detective Dean certainly would when he learnt of the reckless bargain of his *protégé*.

Still, he coveted that ten thousand pounds. While he was about it, he might as well make a clean sweep he decided, and success made him bold.

He took from a compartment in the desk a package of bonds he had concluded to abandon as so much waste paper.

"Golcondas," he explained to the agent. "Here is my authority to sell."

"At par?"

"No, at whatever the market rules. A two per cent. commission ought to make you anxious to make a good bargain!"

"I thank you for your liberality and confidence, Mr. Sheldon."

"Sell as soon as you can."

"And report here?"

"No. Let me see."

Sheldon consulted a time-table. Then he pencilled an address.

"I will await your coming to that place until six o'clock this evening," he said.

"I will be there long before that."

"Don't bring a cheque."

"No, sir—the ready cash."

"In notes of large denomination."

"Your instructions shall be carefully executed."

Davenant left the house. The merchant left it, too, a few minutes later.

He skulked through the rear court, reached a retired street, took a tram, then a cab, changed twice to other vehicles, and finally reached a surburban station on the line of an eastern railway.

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Here he sat down to wait for the express, due at 6.27 p.m., and for Davenant, and the proceeds of the bonds.

He was self-satisfied, triumphant, sanguine of a safe and speedy flight.

He had come to the city, seven years previous, a scheming, penniless pettifogger.

He was leaving it, treasure-rich, laden with splendid spoil, assured of a future of luxury and opulence—the possessor of a cool million, in rare, glittering jewels!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

For Friendship's Sake.

"Patrice!"

That was the beginning, the end, the all in all of Adrian Burgoyne's fervent thoughts, as he left the home of Richard Sheldon.

He had staked everything on the issue of the moment. He had acted independently of the designs of Dean; he had bartered gold for love.

The marplot of his destiny would fly, enriched; Patrice would live, a pauper; but oh! what mattered it all—the prison servitude, the difficult struggle for pelf, the sordid victory of Sheldon, so that he, Burgoyne, won the pearl of precious price—Patrice!

The place that the order Sheldon had written named was near the southern edge of the city. The presentation of the document would insure immediate release of Patrice.

He longed for wings to fly to her side, to tell her how love had inspired a mighty sacrifice. He knew she would sanction his reckless bargain.

He ran along half-a-dozen streets, intent on taking a tram to reach his destination. Of a sudden he halted as he passed a building. It abruptly occurred to him that the rooms of his friend Dean were in that structure. The latter had told him to report at his own hotel every hour, as something might occur requiring his co-operation. His present plan involved several hours' time. He would run up to the detective's apartments, and report.

Dean was just leaving, as he tapped at his door. He scanned Burgoyne's excited face questioningly.

"What has happened?" he demanded. "Your manner tells me that you have made some discovery."

Burgoyne hesitated.

How would this uncompromising emissary of the law take the intelligence he was in honour bound to divulge?

He blurted out the plain, practical facts of the case. Dean stood transfixed.

"Gave up the treasure!—bargained with that soulless scoundrel!" he gasped, fire in his eye, stored-up wrath in voice and gesture. "Man! you have played the coward!"

"For her sake!" pleaded Burgoyne.

"For her sake? Why! in twenty-four hours we would have found her. You have bartered justice for love, when you might have had both. Don't speak! I am boiling over. I did not think it of you. You have spoiled everything. Wait here, Adrian Burgoyne, as you value liberty, happiness, stay here, in this room, till I send for you or come to you."

"But Patrice?" demurred the anxious lover.

"Do you understand me?" roared Dean, bristling with rage. "Either you obey me and help me undo your wretched work, or I wash my hands of the whole case!"

"I will remain—I will obey you," murmured Burgoyne, fairly subdued at the energetic wrath of his companion.

"To think of compromising with that unscrupulous scoundrel, Richard Sheldon, when the rope was fairly dangling for him; to consider yourself, the girl, love, when my reputation as a shrewd police officer was at stake! Burgoyne, I didn't think it of you!"

Abashed, wretched enough, Adrian Burgoyne sat alone in the detective's apartments, to reflect dubiously over the mistake his impulses had led him into. He had time to reflect now. Judgment and emotion at war, he was minded one moment to hasten to Patrice, at all hazards, without loss of time; the next instant he was overwhelmed, as he realised that, in interfering with the delicate machinery of Dean's plans, he had really placed the intrepid officer at a disadvantage.

Mr. Detective Dean puffed down the street like a steam engine, talking to himself, gesticulating energetically, angry at his client, and sorry for him, at one and the same time.

He stopped at the first telephone office he came to. Ringing up the nearest police station of the department, he soon had the transmitter to his lips, giving his instructions.

They were delivered to the lieutenant in charge of the detectives, and, with the celerity of a commander giving orders to his subordinate officers on the battle-field, Dean notified one officer to watch the departing trains, another to haunt the docks of the steamship lines, a third to watch the merchant's residence, a fourth to guard the vicinity of his business office.

The order all along the line was terse and emphatic: "Arrest Richard Sheldon on sight!"

Only too well the detective knew, that now, possessed of a vast fortune, Sheldon would flee the city promptly. He hailed a cab and drove to the merchant's home, but it was purely a visit of formality—the man he sought had departed.

Next, his office; no Sheldon there. Then Dean made a flying trip through the brokers' offices near the stock exchange. No one had seen Sheldon for two days. He seemed to have retired from active dealing; but a broker, overhearing the question of the detective, said:

"I don't know if Sheldon is about or not, but he's selling this morning."

"Selling what?" asked Dean curiously.

"Bonds. I see his name on the official blackboard—Golcondas, at eighty-three."

To the stock exchange the detective repaired. Amid its wild din of men selling and buying the stocks of the world, he soon made out coherency.

One man was more active than the others—a young broker, a newly-fledged Napoleon of finance—who was accompanied by a sleek-looking but anxious-faced man, who bore a handful of bonds, and who seemed to be giving him instructions.

An intelligent look came into the eyes of Dean, as he recognised this man.

"A private detective man," he murmured, "and the same one I have seen so often in confab with Sheldon of late. I understand—Sheldon has authorised him to sell some stocks. Here is my clue. Where the jackal is the lion cannot be far away. This man will lead me to my quarry."

Dean went into a cigar shop near by, and perfected a new disguise. Then he set to pertinaciously shadow the man whom Richard Sheldon had deputed to sell the mining stock, Davenant.

The latter was all business—all leisure, too. It was fully three o'clock in the afternoon before he closed out the last share of stock. It was four when he settled up with the purchasers, on a cash basis.

With ten thousand pounds in his pockets he went to a restaurant, ate a hearty meal after his engrossing labour of the day, consulted his watch, and then ordered the waiter to send in one of the cabmen whose vehicles lined the curb outside.

At an adjoining table the disguised Dean listened eagerly to eve ry word he spoke.

"I want to reach —— Station by six o'clock," he announced to the driver.

"Yes, sir."

"How long will it take to get there?"

"Forty minutes."

"Very good. Wait for me outside for half-an-hour. Consider yourself engaged."

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Then Davenant prolonged the luxury of a royal lunch, topped off with expensive wines, and settled down to a further enjoyment of the novel situation of possessing a small fortune, for a few hours at least, while Dean glided from the restaurant.

He secured a cab, and drove to his rooms. There, dejected, consumed with impatience, he found Burgoyne.

Dean forced him into the vehicle. Briefly, pointedly, he withheld his discoveries and his theory that Sheldon was waiting at the suburban station for Davenant to deliver the proceeds of the bond sales.

They were delayed twice on their drive—once by a block, once by a broken trace. It was dusk when they reached the vicinity of the little suburban station. Dean halted the cab some distance away from it. Then, alighting, he gave Burgoyne his orders.

He was to approach the station from the north; Dean would close in from the west. The latter would take the initiative, and an agreed-on signal was to announce a discovery or peril.

Adrian Burgoyne neared the station just as a porter was lighting the lamps in its waiting-room. Near the platform stood a cab. He peered through the end window of the station.

There stood Richard Sheldon. He was just receiving a bundle of bank-notes from a companion — Davenant, the private detective.

These he stored in the handbag he carried. Then he figured on a slip of paper, counted out some money, tendered it to Davenant, and walked over to a time-table impatiently.

Davenant proceeded to the cab. About to step into it, he started, peered down the dusk-haunted platform, and hurried back into the station again.

The lurker at the end window bent his ear eagerly, as he addressed the merchant:

"Mr. Sheldon!" he spoke sharply and excitedly.

"Yes—what is it?" demanded Sheldon, wheeling abruptly.

"Outside!" quavered the other.

"Well?"

"Dean!"

"The detective?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean it?"

Richard Sheldon turned pale. A low unhurried consultation took place, at the end of which Davenant returned to the cab, and departed with the words:

"The express stops at the level crossing, four hundred yards along the line. You can catch it there."

Richard Sheldon's free hand sought his side coat-pocket, and a grim look settled over his face, as he started down the line, Burgoyne keeping close at his heels.

An open space prevented the latter shadowing his man, except at a distance. In order not to lose sight of him, he ran back, and then crawled under the open platform, gaining the line near a pile of boxes.

Just at that moment Richard Sheldon came into view. His nerves were all a quiver. He knew what was coming, but he did not quail. He was prepared for it.

From a crouching attitude behind a box, Detective Dean suddenly sprang up to confront him.

"Richard Sheldon, I want you."

The officer expected to see his prospective prisoner come to a halt with a shock, from sheer consternation. Not so, however. He, too, made the serious mistake of extending a pair of handcuffs, instead of a revolver.

Quick as a flash, Sheldon sprang forward. He saw his advantage, and pursued it promptly. He gave the box a push. It swung back, and the disconcerted Dean with it. It toppled and fell. The next moment it crashed to the platform, with the reckless detective under it, one arm and one leg being pinioned beneath it.

The fugitive financier directed a swift glance towards the station. No one was in sight. At the crossing directly north a shrill whistle cut the air, as the express thundered down to a stop.

He drew a revolver, glaring demoniacally at his helpless foe. Then he pocketed it again, drew forth, instead, a long keen-bladed knife, and, with a savage growl, sprang at the prostrate Dean.

"I'll seal your lips, meddler, traitor!" he hissed. "Noiseless death, the best! Take that!"

The knife was poised. Its baleful gleam told the shrinking and helpless detective what he had to expect.

Just then, however, was an interruption. Just then the appalled Burgoyne crept from under the platform.

"Hold!" he gasped, "or I fire——"

A cry of dismay completed the sentence. He found himself unarmed. In crawling under the platform he had lost his only weapon—a revolver.

"You, too!" hissed the ferocious Sheldon. "This one first. Your blood be on your own heads!"

Toot—toot!

The train at the crossing was starting up again. He had no time to spare. He made a powerful sweep with the knife.

It descended.

But not upon the figure of his intended victim.

Flinging himself forward, Adrian Burgoyne interposed his form as a shield for his imperilled friend.

One keen, searing contact, a gush of blood, a thousand darting pains, and the knife sank deep in his unsheltered breast.

With fading glance, he saw the assassin speed away towards the approaching train.

With fluttering senses, as he realised that he had saved the life of his companion at the peril of his own, the majestic words seemed to permeate his soul like a balm of peace and satisfaction supreme:

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(To be concluded.)

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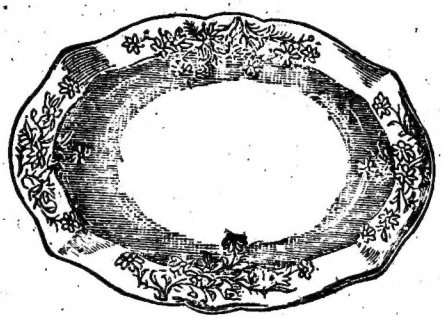

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